Masumbuko Mununguri

The Closeness of the God of Our Ancestors

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THE CLOSENESS OF THE GOD OF OUR ANCESTORS
© St Paul Communications/Daughters of St Paul
ISBN 9966-21-411-9
Year of Publication: 1998

English Translation by Fergus Garrett FMS
Marist International Centre
NAIROBI January 1997

Paulines
PAULINES PUBLICATIONS AFRICA
Daughters of St Paul
P.O. Box 49026 Nairobi, Kenya

Printed by Kolbe Press, P.O. Box 468, Limuru (Kenya)

Paulines Publications Africa is an activity of the Daughters of St Paul, an international religious congregation, using the press, radio, TV and films to spread the gospel message and to promote the dignity of all people. The books published, however, reflect the opinions of their authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the congregation.

Dedication

To all those who, from the initiatory grove of the forest, saw and heard the Word of God of our Forebears become flesh and met him in the man of Africa, brother of the Proto-Ancestor of humanity, we dedicate this work.

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Abbreviations Used

AAS	Acta Apostolicae Sedis
BTA	Bulletin de Théologie Africaine
CEP	Centre d'Etudes Pastorales
CERA	Centre d'Etudes des Religions Africaines
CETA	Conférence des Eglises de Toute Afrique
CRA	Cahiers des Religions Africaines
DC	Documentation Catholique
FCK	Faculté de Théologie Catholique de Kinshasa
PUZ	Presses Universiataires du Zaïre
RCA	Revue du Clergé Africain
TOB	Traduction Oecumenique de la Bible [Ecumenical French Translation of the Bible]
TSH	Théologie et Sciences Humaines

"We will not have advanced one step in the elaboration of an African theology if we don't take the risk of interpretation."
(J.M. ELA, *Ma foi d'africain*, p.205)

FOREWORD

Everything which has a beginning has an end and it all begins where it finishes. A page of my formation has been turned, crowned by this modest work. The long journey which preceded and prepared the way for this was happily and fruitfully accomplished thanks to the people I have known, some near and some far off.

I take the opportunity, in this solemn and meaningful moment of the presentation of this work to say thank you to all those who, far off or close by, have contributed to it in one way or another.

In such circumstances, it is always a delicate matter to mention names, for one risks forgetting some of them. I want to express my gratitude to all those who have supported me both day and night, in joy and pain, under the torrential rains and the torrid heat of Kinshasa. May no one of them feel forgotten.

All the same I risk mentioning in a special way the Marist Brothers of the Schools (F.M.S.) of the community of Binze who, despite their own difficulties, offered me a setting which helped me very much in getting through the stage that I bring to a close today. I would want also to thank all the colleagues and friends who did not give up encouraging me every time my human effort required it. I could not want to mention here the name of each of them individually.

How can I thank in a very special way the Professors of the F.C.K. for having initiated me to research and to scientific rigor! Indeed it is thanks to their solicitude and their attentiveness that this cycle of studies has been brought to an end, without any obstacles. Among them I mention especially Professor Pierre Nyembo Kisimba who accepted the task of supervising this dissertation. He put his time, his knowledge and his energy at my disposal so that I could put together this work, however modest it may be. May Professor Kisimba find here the expression of my deep gratitude.

I would be ungrateful if I did not offer my heartfelt thanks to the M.I.C. Community (Nairobi) and to Brother Fergus Garrett in particular for having made possible the English version of this work. It was Brother Fergus in fact who translated the text, from the original entitled "La proximité du Dieu de nos ancêtres: une approche africaine de l'incarnation."

Finally, we thank all those who, by their tenacity in the theological, spiritual, political, social ... arena, have provided me with a testimony of perseverance in hope of the final victory of life over death, of peace over war, of truth over falsehood, of love over hate, of service over selfishness, in following Christ our Proto-Ancestor and Universal Brother.

Br. Masumbuko Mununguri
F.M.S.

General Introduction

"Nothing new under the sun," exclaimed the Preacher one day (*Eccl.* 1: 9). If it is true that whatever has been will be again, it is necessary, however, to pay attention to the evidence and to note that a "God who becomes man" is an original and unique event. What is at stake is the magnitude of the event. God, in his infinite graciousness, wanted to rescue man from the fetters of individual and collective sin. He sent his own Son into the world as his "final Revelation" to humanity.[1] This had been prepared by God himself to welcome the great mystery for which the promise had been made to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, the Ancestors of Israel and to all those who, in history, have been integrated into the great family of believers.

> Our African Ancestors, without being fully conscious of it, were being prepared by God in the time of darkness, so that he could integrate them also into the great mystery of the Incarnation of his Word. Their spiritual life, wholly centered on faith in God as Goodness and as Creator, was fulfilled in this mysterious meeting between God and humanity.

Pope Paul VI has targetted what he preferred to call the "African sense of the sacred" or a "spiritual vision of life." He notes that

> "a common and very important element of this spiritual concept is the idea of God as the first and last cause of all the things. This concept, which is felt more than analysed, lived more than thought, is expressed in extremely diverse ways, according to the culture. In reality the presence of God penetrates traditional African life as the presence of a superior being, both personal and mysterious. One has recourse to him in the solemn hours of life and in its most crucial moments, when one considers useless the intercession of all other beings who could serve as intermediaries. Nearly always the fear of his great power is overcome and God is

[1] Jean Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio, Rome*, 1990, no. 5.

> invoked as Father. The prayers that one addresses to him, whether individual or collective, are spontaneous and sometimes touching, while among the forms of sacrifice (distinguishes) that of the first-fruits is notable for the purity of its symbolism."[2]

Pope Paul VI thus gives us a condensed summary of the African religious heritage. But there is one fundamental element which is forgotten: the Ancestors who constitute precisely the link between the African and his God. So, as we said just above, God sent his Son into the world (African) as his unique and definitive revelation. This event was a complete turnaround for the African on his path towards the God of his Ancestors. Christ Jesus, of the line of David, comes to travel the road with peoples of every culture, every nation.

One question, however, remains unanswered. Who is this "Man-Jesus" whom one calls the Christ? In other words, is it obvious and easy for an African to understand (one does not know how) that there is a father-son relationship between the God of his Ancestors and the Son of Mary and Joseph? The question deserves to be asked because the understanding by the African of the mystery of the Incarnation would help him to be inserted further and more effectively into the "less known," the Word of God made flesh. In this way we can already propose that the God of our Ancestors is made present in and through his Son. God has not ceased being felt and discerned only in nature and in events, but he has also become one of us, our Emmanuel.

The God of our Ancestors is conceived not only as far off and inaccessible to man, but also as near in some circumstances. Even in this last case he remains the Invisible and Completely Other. And in many places, the announcement of the Good News of Christ Jesus strikes at the fundamental theme of the hiddenness and remoteness of God, the God who had departed from the world of man.[3] We would like to try to show that God did not desert the world of man. Even more, he entered into the life of man. This God is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob and of our African Ancestors. And the Word incarnated in our world is the Revealer of a God not different from the one that our Ancestors came to know as the Creator of all that is.

The theology of fulfilment will help to give our topic a thematic approach. In the first phase we will put ourselves in the position of our fathers to see how they lived out their relationship with the Creator.

God is transcendent, that is, he escapes the understanding of man

2 Paul VI, *Africae Terrarum*, Rome, 1967, no. 8.

3 Cf L.V. THOMAS, in *La Terre Africaine et ses religions*, Paris, 1980, p. 127-137

who can only fall down in admiration and reverential awe before a God who is outside all reality. This remoteness is considered as an expression of the invisible and intangible character of God rather than in the sense of a God absent from the daily life of the African. For (this) the African's experience is constantly that of an immanent God, one who is a participant in this world but without being lost in it, without being consumed by it. The African has recourse to him spontaneously in misfortune and despair. He expects help and protection from him, for he alone gives life, being himself the source of life. The Ancestors play the important role of intercessors and arbitrators between the African and his God. That is to ask, to praise, to thank, to call on for help ... God is the final and most effective recourse.

After this preview, limited by design to the "mutual" relationships between God and the African, we will make a leap and say that the incarnate Word, Jesus of Nazareth, of the line of David, the Messiah promised to Abraham and to Isaac, is "the personal messenger" of the God of our Ancestors. He came to fulfil the faith of our Ancestors in a God whom they adored without really knowing him, and to bring to its fulfilment the African's longing for life. In this way we hope to follow the path to the God of our Ancestors, towards Jesus Christ sent by the Father to save the African from eternal death, from sorcery, from magic, from jealousy, from barrenness from all the "biophobic" powers.[4] In order to express his adherence to the Son of the God of his Ancestors and to express the satisfaction he derives from his gifts, the African addresses him as "Celestial Host," Proto-Ancestor, Eldest of the Great Family, Living Mediator, Great Master Initiator. These titles express a new closeness to the God of our Ancestors through the saving event of the Incarnation.

Having grasped (partially it is true, for the Incarnation remains a mystery of faith) the intrinsic relation between the God of his Ancestors and Jesus Christ Son of God made flesh, the African will be able to proclaim all the more that the "God of our Ancestors has come to us." This will be Good News for him especially because the coming of the divine Host reinforces the life received from God by our Ancestors who in their turn transmitted it to us.

The African already knew God. He "knew his closeness to him, but as an unknown, for he was ignorant of his intimate secrets. He affirmed his greatness and complete superiority over him. But he did

[4] "Biophobic": fear of life. We use this neologism here to signify all the powers destructive of life, powers hostile to the well-being of man.

not dare to believe that the hidden desires and the deep reflections of the heart of man could interest, sadden or rejoice the one who nevertheless knows all. He recognised his inaccessible majesty, *but never encountered him as one encounters a person face to face.* He received the gifts of Immana (God) with gratitude but he never had the audacity to think that Immana, in person, wanted to make his permanent home in his heart. *Rurema* (the Maker) gave him the wealth of the earth: but never had he communicated to him his own divine riches."[5]

It is thus, excited and encouraged by the seriousness and the importance of this religious Novelty, we would like to essay a way of understanding this unique event which fulfils and perfects the African sense of the sacred. African human reason was incapable of reaching that level without the self-revelation of God in his Son Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Saviour.

5 *D. NOTHOMB, L'homme et Dieu. Valeurs et pierres d'attente dans un humanisme africain,* in *Lumen Vitae* 20 (1965), no. 1, p.96. It is the author who underlines. He is from among us.

CHAPTER ONE

THE GOD OF OUR ANCESTORS

Introduction

Today it has become banal and almost chronic to repeat that "for Africans the nonexistence of God is unthinkable."[1] All the researches undertaken by the CERA from its foundation until the present time have done nothing more than conscientize and attract the attention of Africans and other citizens of the earth about this solid affirmation expressed above.

We call it, this God of the Africans, the "God of our Ancestors" simply because the notion of Ancestor seems to us to correspond very well to the African mentality. The expression "God of our Ancestors" corresponds better to the idea that the Africans have of the role played by those who have preceded us in their relations with the Lord of life.

The pages which follow will demonstrate this more directly. We say "the God of our Ancestors" recognized through the wonders of the world.[2] This expression does not exhaust the possibilities of naming the "God of our fathers" as Fr Muzungu says in his book of the same title.[3] Moreover "God is a Spirit who cannot be named: the number of his names is infinite."[4]

We contemporary Africans follow in the footsteps of our Ancestors who came first, and thanks to their intuition, said something about this mystery which is beyond human understanding. For "outside of

1 W.A. UMEZINWA, *Les éléments constitutifs de la religion traditonnelle* in *Les romans de Mongo Beti*, Benjamin Matip et Ferdinand Oyono, in CHA 7 (1973) no. 13, p.7
2 Cf B. MUZUNGU, *Théologie de la création*, stenciled course (unpublished), p.3
3 Cf B. MUZUNGU, *Le Dieu de nos pères,* 3 vol., Bujumbura, 1974, 1975, 1981
4 A. MARTIN DEL MOLIN, *L'idée de Dieu chez les Bubis de Fernando Poo*, in RCA 11 (1956) no. 1, p.42.

an explicit historical revelation it is very difficult to know the positive will of God. Even so, our Ancestors did what they could to know it, that is, to follow what is contained in the individual and collective conscience."[5] This had been fixed and preserved in myths, legends, fables, sayings, and proverbs. The cultural heritage reveals an author of the universe who has always been before all things, even before creation and transcending it. Our Ancestors gave him the name "Nzambi" or "Nzambi a Mpungu" (Kongo), "Nziam" (Teke), "Mvidie Mukulu" or "Maweja Nangila" (Luba), "Nyamé" (Cameroun), "Mulungu" (Kenya), "Nsambi" or "Onyashongo" (Tetela), "Nzakomba" (Mongo), "Rurema" (Rwanda-Burundi), "Luyira" (Hunde), "Amma" (Dogon), "Mawu" (Ewé), "Olorun" (Yoruba), "Nyamuhanga" (Nande) etc.[6]

Could anyone know this being whom our Ancestors finally spoke of as "Our God"? We mention briefly a few African traditions on this subject.

In the Shoa religion, God is known under the name of "Mweri" (Supreme Being), "Musikavanku" (Creator of men), "Sama-simba" (All Powerful). This Supreme Being is so great, so sacred, so holy, so independent that he is beyond all understanding.[7]

The Sakata of Zaire say of this Supreme Being, whom they name "Nzaon," that he lives somewhere in the heavens, in his heavenly village.[8]

To the question of knowing "who is Nzambi", the Kongo will answer that Nzambi is the impenetrable one that no one has ever seen and that no one can represent by a fetish or a statuette. He will add that Nzambi is unique, separated from all else, invisible yet living, acting sovereignly and close to all that he protects. He will continue, saying that Nzambi is the Lord, the ruler who placed man here below for him to leave one day at the hour of death. And he will end by implying that despite all this Nzambi wants neither cult, nor temple, nor offering.[9] This answer of the Kongo brings together in a few words the religious inheritance carried within African traditions.

5 B. MUZUNGU, *Religions traditionnelles africaines et Théologie Africaine, Bilan et perspectives*, Kinshasa, 1989, p.79.

6 Cf BUAKASA Tkm, *Lire la Religion Africane*, Louvain-La-Neuve, 1988, p. 30. Tkm is the abbreviation adopted by the author for his post-name Tulu Kia Mpansu, given in its entirety in the bibliography.

7 Cf BUAKASA Tkm, o.c., p. 31.

8 Cf BUAKASA Tkm, o.c., p. 30.

9 Cf BUAKASA Tkm, o.c., p. 32-33.

Our proposal, in this chapter, is to make a small beginning centered on certain attributes of the God of our Ancestors, attributes that will help us to understand the connection that we will pursue in the second chapter. Professor Muzungu gives some of these attributes from which we will choose a few and add others.[10] Starting from these attributes the God of our Ancestors has been differently named according to the way our Ancestors considered an event, a situation or a given obstacle. So in the land of the Great Lakes he is called "Nyamuzinda" (the one who is there where everything ends), "Nnakuzimu" (Lord of the beyond), "Lungwe" (the inaccessible creator), "Mugiri" or "Mulemi" (one who made), "Lulema" (creator), "Nyamubahu" (who is), "Imana" (happiness, luck, blessing), "Nyen'ubuntu" (goodness), "Rukunda" (the one who loves), "Lakare" (the efficient).

In Igbo country, he is also glorified under many signs, like that: "Cukwemeka (God gave me), "Kenecukwu" (God praised for his kindness), "Cukwuma" (God knows all), "Cukwumai jem" (God knows my ways), "Osebulwa" (Lord who rules the world), "Chukulwa" (the Supreme Being is great), "Chukwunala" (may the Supreme Being watch over us), etc.[11]

The reflections which follow will expand what has been said in this introductory note. We will present them in two points. We will give our attention first to the place of the God of our Ancestors in relation to African man. Then we will examine the major implications of this African man vis-à-vis the God of our Ancestors.

I.
The Place of the God of Our Ancestors according to African Man

Our Ancestors considered God to be at the same time transcendent (far off) and immanent (near). These two attributes put them in a certain relation to God. Present, yet absent, the God of our Ancestors is,

10 Cf B. Muzungu, *Le Dieu de nos pères*, Vol. 1, p. 38. The author gives the attributes of Imana in the theophoric Rwandan names; Imana, providence, source of wealth, author of the life, supreme reality, almighty first cause, judge, good creator, immortal, eternal, omniscient, invisible.

11 Cf BUAKASA Tkm, o.c., p 32.

one can say, a God "transcendentally immanent," to use an expression of E.J. Penoukou.[12]

Generally this God, whom man has never seen, is inaccessible to man,. His celestial village seems so far above the world and its inhabitants that God occupies himself very little with their lives except through intermediaries.[13] This is what we will verify below. But before that we relate a mythical story from North Cameroon. It will be very useful in order to understand what will follow. It is introduced by a note of W.A. Umezinwa who said that in the past, God lived on earth, and played a direct role in human affairs. He left the earth only because a certain event unleashed a misunderstanding between him and human beings.[14]

The mythical story which is given in its entirety is from the Giziga of North Cameroon, as it was told to R. Jaouen: At the time the sky was close to the Earth, Bumbulvun lived with men. He was so close that men could move about only with their backs bent. On the other hand, they didn't have to worry about food, they had only to reach out and tear shreds from the sky and eat them. But one day a girl, the chief's daughter, who was a "mukuwan" (a wicked girl, who did the opposite of every one else), instead of taking pieces of the celestial arch for her food, began to look at the earth and to pick up the seeds that she found there. She made a mortar and a pestle to crush the seeds that she had picked from the ground.

Kneeling on the ground, every time she raised her pestle, it would hit the sky and God too. Busy with her work, the girl said to the sky: "God, can't you move back a little?" The sky moved a little and the girl was able to stand up. She continued and as she ground her seeds, she raised her pestle a little higher. She implored the Sky a second time: the Sky moved again a little more. Then she began to throw her pestle into the air. At the third entreaty, the Sky, indignant, went so far, that it reached the place where it is now.

Since that time men walked and stood upright. They no longer fed on shreds of Sky: they became eaters of millet. Furthermore, God no longer shows himself to men as previously where, every evening, he came to settle their discussions ; now the men are alone with their palavers.[15]

12 Cf E.J. PENOUKOU, *Christologie au village*, in Fr. KABASELE E.A., *Chemins de la christologie africaine*, Paris, 1986, p. 87.

13 Cf BUAKASA Tkm, o.c., p. 31.

14 Cf W.A. UMEZINWA, o.c., p.7

15 Cf R. JAOUEN *Le mythe de la retraite de Bumbulvun chez les Giziga de N-Cameroun*, dans Afrique et Parole (1971), no. 33-34. One finds a similar story in B. MUZUNGU, *Le Dieu de nos pères*, vol. 1, p. 70.

L.V. Thomas makes the comment that this myth evokes an earlier era when God was much closer and that the world has not always been the way it is now. In this view the time of man's incompleteness appears ambiguous, as if the divine closeness did not allow him to be himself.[16] A conclusion which emerges from this is one that we can draw, with L. V. Thomas: "God never returned and man has remained alone."[17]

However, it appears to any prudent and enlightened observer of the daily life of the African that God is sometimes considered even like an "accomplice" of man in some circumstances and at certain key moments of life. The God of our Ancestors is like some one mixing in the human drama, but for all that not confusing himself with man. He remains very powerful, very great, very distant, but in his goodness he does not abandon man to his sad fate in a hostile and bewildering world.[18] It is on all these elements, apparently incompatible, that we will focus our attention in the notes which follow, while taking notice in passing that "the God of African mythology looks like the God of the Old Testament who, as one knows, withdrew from the first human community after the fall."[19]

A Transcendent God

The "Petit dictionnaire de théologie catholique" defines "transcendence" as being a term which does not refer to a single determined domain of beings and cannot therefore be said of a single category, but necessarily refers to every real or thinking being; for instance: being, unity, truth, goodness, etc. These terms are really transcendent, says our dictionary, and therefore metaphysical, and because they belong to every thinking being, one cannot question their value, or cast doubt

16 Cf L.V. TM, o.c., p. 136.

17 Cf L.V. TM, o.c., p. 137.

18 Cf J. HALLAIRE, *Noms théophores chez les Sar (Tchad)* in *Afrique et Parole* (1972), no. 39-40, p.36-55, cited and commented on by L.V. THOMAS, o.c., p. 139. The author recalls that it is almost a common place to define the God of traditional religions as someone very great and very distant. And elsewhere he notes that the divine names of the Sar which explicitly link the person of the speaker to God demonstrate the conviction that God is present in an active way in our life. Concering "traditional African religions" we adopt, with Professor Muzungu, the singular, that is, "*traditional African religion*" on the grounds that he explains in his contribution to the 17th theological week of Kinshasa (See *Actes, Théologie Africaine, Bilan et perspectives,* Kinshasa, 1989, pp. 77-81.

19 W. A. UMEZINWA, o.c., p. 8.

on them, or even deny them, without positing them again, at least implicitly.[20]

We do not want to lose ourselves in speculations, however useful, but which one can use to support and express the concrete experience that our Ancestors had of God. We can state this immediately: that one can deduce from the practices and the religious ideas of our Ancestors that God is transcendent, as seen in their silence, their words, their gestures. It is thus that in traditional African religion "God's transcendence is conceived of in various ways."[21]

For a better grasp of the transcendence of the God of our Ancestors, we make our own the different African visions that are suggested to us by Professor Mbiti.[22] According to him the transcendence of God[23] can be thought of in several ways.

Transcendence "in Terms of Time"

The transcendence of God is conceived of in terms of time. What does this mean? Simply that our Ancestors considered God as outside and even beyond time. This transcendence in time appears of prime importance for behind this idea there is the concept of the eternity of God. But listen to Professor Mbiti in his investigations among African peoples regarding this massive affirmation of the eternal existence of God: "God is seen as being in and beyond the 'past.' So the Akan praise him as 'He who is there now as from ancient times,' that is, he who endures for ever. The Tonga refer to him as 'the Ancient of Days.' The Akan believe, furthermore, that God is eternal and infinite. These peoples' concept of God's transcendence would clearly indicate that for them there is no terminus or time when God was not, since from the most ancient time which man can think of God was in existence."[24]

Among the Nande of Zaire "Nyamuhanga God is present yesterday, today and tomorrow."[25] The Ngombe of Zaire who are a people

20 Cf K. RAHNER e.a., *Petit dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, Paris, 1969, art. *Transcendance,* p. 484.

21 J.S. MBITI, *Concepts of God in Africa*, London, 1970, p. 12. This work explains on p. 384 what the African thinks and professes about God. For us, it is a real anthology of the religious heritage of the African people. All the peoples of Africa are represented there either directly or through their socio-cultural neighbors.

22 Cf J.S. MBITI, o.c., p.12-15.

23 In this first chapter when we speak of God it is necessary to listen to the "God of our Ancestors."

24 J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 12.

25 WASWANDI Kakule, Nyamuhanga: la conception de Dieu chez les Nande du Zaïre, in CRA 19 (1985) No. 38, p. 254.

"of the forest" express the same idea in referring to the forest, which in their eyes always existed. Oh! so for them God is even "older" than the forest because it is he who created it. Seing the relevance of the words employed by the author, we do not hesitate to give the text in all its freshness: "The Ngombe, who live in thick forests, express this concept in terms relating to the forest. They cannot think of its never having been in existence, and it is their most concrete indicator of longevity. They look upon God as 'the everlasting one of the forest'. As far back as they can imagine, the forest was there, and so was God who antedates it, since he created it."[26]

These examples of African traditions are sufficient proof of the notion of a God who is transcendent in terms of time and of eternity. It is moreover this last which is concealed in the affirmation of a "God auto-Creator" of the Luba of whom Professor Bimwenyi speaks: Mudifuke, the one who creates himself or the auto-creator, Nkayende-Mudifuke, the one who created himself ... the origin is the origin of itself! God is without origin ... origin of himself."[27] Saying that God is Self-Creator is to affirm directly that he is before time, the creator of time.

Transcendence "in Terms of Space, Distance, and Outreach"

The God of our Ancestors is transcendent in terms of space, distance and inaccessibility. We find again the central theme of our mythical story mentioned above, knowledge of the spatial remoteness of God. It is this that Professor Mbiti noted moreover in his investigations of which we give some results here: "When the Mende call God 'the High up one,' the Nuba say that there is nothing higher than God, and Banyarwanda that 'nothing is above God,' they are all thinking primarily in spatial terms. The invisible God is 'above' or 'higher than' this otherwise boundless distance and space."[28]

Professor Bimwenyi is in full agreement with this same meaning when he says that God resides in higher region and in principle inaccessible. He calls this remoteness a "geographical gap" and compares

[26] J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 12. A little further on, on p. 13, Professor Mbiti mentions also the Zulu who cannot imagine that there was a time when the lightning was not; but God antedates it since he created it. The Ngoni know God as "the beginning of all things ", and "placed as far as possible", portraying him as transcendent, beyond all things in temporal comparison.

[27] BIMWENYI KWESHI, *Discours théologique négro-Africain*, Paris, 1981, p. 551.

[28] J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 13

God to the sun whose beauty can be blindingly bright. God reigns like a lone leopard in a symbolic inaccessible space and his explosive power ignores any obstacle. The Professor concludes by saying that in black African consciousness, the experience of the spatial remoteness of God could, in a certain measure, consolidate the "difference," what he calls "spatial distance," between the "world of God" and the "world of man." This would explain in part the presence of a host of mediators or intermediaries between the two world.[29]

The Mongo of Zaire are very conscious of this dimension of the faith of our Ancestors. Indeed for them "the one who hovers above us, he is Njakomba."[30] We find again the same echo among the Bubis of Fernando Poo who believe that we men cannot communicate directly with God for he lives in the highest part of the universe and no man can see him or know how he lives and what he wants.[31]

F. Eboussi Boulaga gives the reason for the retreat of God from the world: to allow man to exercise his freedom and his responsibility. But on the other hand he notes that "the distance between the sky and the earth shows the difference between two worlds, without however preventing passage from one to the other" and that "there is no rupture, but between the two worlds communication is always possible."[32]

For a last look at African traditions relative to our topic we will go to the Kikuyu of Kenya. It is S.G. Kibicho who takes us there. The Kikuyu confesses that "God transcends all his creation. He lives in heaven high above his creation, from where he can observe everything going on in the world below."[33]

This brief preview of the African concept of the "spatial" aspect of the transcendence of God shows to what extent the African does not believe in mixing God with our "human paths." He has his world, we have his protection and are "supervised" by him. He lives so far above us, that it is useless and even senseless to want to reach him; in any case, whoever would try, could not get there by his own efforts.

29 Cf. O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, o.c., p. 550.
30 V. MULAGO, *La religion traditionnelle des Bantu et leur vision du monde*, Kinshasa, 1980, p.127.
31 Cf A. MARTIN DEL MOLINO, o.c., p.37.
32 F. EBOUSSI BOULAGA, *Dieu en Afrique*, Douala, 1979, p.19.
33 S.G. KIBICHO, The Interaction of the traditional "Kikuyu" concept God of with the biblical concept, in CRA 2 (1968), no. 4, p.232.

Transcendence "in Terms of Worship and Exaltation"

The transcendence of our God is expressed also in terms of worship and glorification. This is to state quite simply that our acts of worship and our prayers of praise do not reach God simply because he is inaccessible.

In other words, he is so distant from us and such a "Great Independent."[34] that he has only to accept our copious acts of thanksgiving. He is beyond of all these marks of recognition.

J.S. Mbiti confirms this in reporting as follows: "The Akan praise him as 'He who is beyond all thanks.' God's acts are so innumerable that human thanks cannot match them, even if men spend their entire lives thanking him. It means that God cannot be exhausted by praise and thanksgiving for he is 'beyond' that point ... God cannot be reached in worship."[35]

Anticipating a little what will be said later, we could say with Professor Mulago that one does not worship God, not just because he has no need of it but also and especially because he is inaccessible.[36]

Since God could not leave man in total isolation, he allowed for some "means of communication" between the two of them. Thus he himself wanted intermediaries who would be a bridge between the two worlds. By this means, man circumvents the obstacle of the inaccessibility of God, as we read in J.S. Mbiti: "The use of intermediaries between man and God, which is a widespread practice among many African peoples, readily suggests the concept of the transcendent God being linked with men through a ladder of intermediaries."[37]

In this gamut of intermediaries the elders or the ancestors, living or dead, occupy a special position because they are supposed to be "seated at the side of God" and capable of presenting to him the grievances of men and of expressing to them the will of the Other.[38] We want of course to schematize these "mediations" for there is "such a world of invisible beings who make us forget the remoteness of God."[39]

We limit ourselves here to emphasizing aspects of traditional African belief concerning the transcendent grandeur of God, leaving aside,

34 V. MULAGO, o.c., p. 102. This expression is drawn from the religious beliefs of the Bashi.
35 J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 14.
36 Cf. V. MULAG, o.c., p. 99.
37 J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 14.
38 Cf J. S. MBITI, o.c., p. 16: "Elders are thought to be 'nearer' to him than are people, and can go to places where he is to be found and sit there in the place of God's children ..."
39 L.V. THOMAS, o.c., p. 143.

provisionally, other considerations in order to treat of its implications for the ordinary daily life of Africans.

Transcendence "in Terms of Limitlessness"

This concept supports, *mutatis mutandis*, another idea that we have raised, that of the spatial remoteness of God as an aspect of the transcendence of God. It is because he is "separate geographically" from man and inaccessible to him that God is without limits. His "living space" fills the whole universe. He goes even beyond the universe for this itself has limits. Naturally, the African faced with this "spatial abyss" is full of admiration and fear.

We return to the investigations of J.S. Mbiti among the Tonga and the Akan, investigations which lead to the following conclusion: "So the Tonga describe God as 'the limitless one who fills all space' and 'the surpassingly great Spirit'. The Akan conceive of him as 'He beyond whom there is nothing', or, 'He who alone is full of abundance."[40]

As the Great Spirit, it must be that God is without limits simply because a spirit is immaterial and therefore beyond spatio-temporal contingencies. In current language one would speak of the omnipresence of God with all that it implies, that nothing is unknown or foreign to him. J.S. Mbiti has said it much better than we can: "As spirit, God has no limit and transcends all boundaries. There cannot be and there is no 'beyond' for God for he is omnipresent and there is no vacuum of existence which he does not fill up. He is or he has the most abundant reality of being, lacking no completeness and possessing all fullness of being. He is the ultimate, the final and the absolute Supreme Being, beyond the aspiration and imagination of man."[41]

The God of our Ancestors knows no limits in all his attributes. He gives without counting and without return. He is omniscient and almighty. By his almighty power he supervises and protects man and his natural environment. He is at the origin of all that is. He has no end. One could continue indefinitely to enumerate the "qualities" of God which compelled the African to recognize that the God of his Ancestors was "limitless," in Kiswahili "bila mpaka," that is without limits.

40 J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 14.
41 J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 14-15.

Transcendence "in Terms of Man's Explanation or Understanding of God"

The transcendence of God is here deduced from the inability of man to explain and understand God. What has already been said above by means of other aspects of this transcendence is sufficient for us to understand the embarrassment of man before the one that he must call the Intangible, the Inexplicable, the Elusive. This is the case among many African peoples as one can see in the following example: "The Ngombe describe him simply as 'the Unexplainable.' The Abur believe that God is 'effectively unknowable' concerning his ultimate Nature. In talking about the transcendental aspect of God the Lugbara say: 'We do not know what God is like; he is everywhere, in the wind and in the sky.'"[42]

J.M. Ela invites us to draw the same conclusion when he writes that "In black Africa, God remains beyond the grasp of man, beyond space or word, so much so that one can see in him the Chief of the Obscure, the Lord of the Forgotten, as the Guiziga of North Cameroon say."[43] We find the same idea among the Bakongo who consider Nzambi as sovereign and unapproachable Lord against whom there is no recourse.[44]

The contrast between "finite" man and "infinite" God is crushing and unimaginable. In addition the African has no desire to understand, at any cost, the Incomprehensible and to explain the Inexplicable. He leaves it all trusting in the one who has willed him to be so small and so limited.

Man does not know and does not seek to know who God is, how he exists, how he supervises the world, what he wants.

The little that he knows of God, he has imagined from the marvels of creation which began by itself. Who can put it better than J.S. Mbiti, God evades or defies human comprehension; he cannot be grasped within the confines of the human mind. His beginning is unknown; how he carries out his work is unknown; and in every aspect of his nature or being, he is 'the utterly unexplainable'. It is perhaps for this reason, that many African peoples have only a few phrases and words that describe the fact of God's existence, and beyond that they readily admit that they do not know much about him."[45]

42 J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 15.

43 J.M. ELA, *Ma foi d'africaine*, Paris, 1985, p. 72. For the spelling of the word "Guiziga," we note that R. Jaouen writes "Giziga" (Cfr supra, note 15).

44 Cf. V. MULAG, o.c., p. 97.

45 J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 15.

This aspect of the transcendence of God will surely encourage man to have recourse to mediation in order to reduce a little his inability to penetrate the mystery of God. But we must not anticipate, we must first see the final aspect of this transcendence as it is presented by Professor Mbiti.

Transcendence "in terms of His Supreme Status"

The transcendence of God is found also in his dealings with other beings, divinities, human organizations. After all that we have said above, God can only be far above all these realities, otherwise he would be no longer inexplicable, incomprehensible, without limits, the more so as it is he who created all that is. The Maker cannot be inferior and subordinate to his creatures, as Professor Muzungu tells us. And in African tradition there is complete unanimity on this question. [46] Later we will return to this at greater length.

To understand the aspect of transcendence without a detailed examination here, it will be useful to recall that the African has a profound belief in spirits. There is no need to demonstrate this belief, it is so deeply-rooted in the daily life of Africans. They resort to them very frequently to interest them in their causes. But they do not lose sight of the view that God is always the true Lord of the world and of life, and that the spirits are his ministers and intermediaries between man and God.[47]

God exercises superiority over all beings: they are inferior and subordinate. According to Professor Buakasa the African classifies spirits according to their importance. Consistently in this classification the most important beings are God, the Civilizing Heroes, the Ancestors, and the Spirits or Genii of nature.[48] But God remains "Chiukwu" (Supreme Spirit) and "Chi-neke" (Spirit Maker) among the Igbo of Nigeria[49] He is the Eldest Spirit (Ancestor), Lord of the groundnuts, Lord of the water courses and of the forests, Lord and Master of men, Lord of death, Lord of life."[50]

The witnesses in this area are numerous and all agree. There is for

46 Cf B. MUZUNGU, *Théologie de la creation*, p. 3

47 Cfr NYEME TESE, *Munga Ethique en un milieu africain*, Ingenbohl, 1975, p. 40.

48 Cf. BUAKASA Tkm, o.c., p.29-30. *The Héros Civilisateurs' are identified as secondary gods*: "Obosson" (Ashanti/ Ghana), "Irown" (Ewe/ Togo), "Orisho" (Yoruba- Benin/ Nigeria), "Faro" (Bambara/ Côte d'Ivoire), "Lyangombe" (Great Lakes Region).

49 Cf. BUAKASA Tkm, o.c., p. 30.

50 O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, o.c., p. 468-470.

example the case among the Tetela of Congo where "Onnyashongo" (God) is considered as being at the origin of life and its guarantee and by this very fact even superior to those who are charged with transmitting it to the living.[51] Among the Bubis of Fernando Poo "everything that falls from on high to the earth, is sent by God: the rain, the storms; thunderbolts, certain stones. The whole earth is the property of God."[52]

This brief overview brings us back finally to our initial position. The God of our Ancestors has a "superior status," he is above all that the human spirit can see, hear, touch, think and imagine. The potential of human knowledge does not limit the Greatness and the Superiority of God.

This is what Professor Mbiti noticed in every case among the Indem and the Ganda: "They (Indem) call him 'the Great God,' who is the greatest deity of all." When the Ganda consider God to be 'the Father of the gods', they are recognizing his supremacy over all other spiritual beings."[53]

These professions of beliefs reject out of hand the polytheism and animism that have been attached to the African spirit by some ethnosociologists and by some badly informed missionaries. The Jews would say: "Our Lord is above all gods" (Ex 18:11; 2Ch 2:4; Ps 76:14). Yes, our God is greater than all the gods, including all human beings and infra-humans who have the rank of gods in society.

What can be said then of the position of God with regard to human organizations and institutions? We have said it before and we repeat it: God is above everything that man could make, invent or imagine. In human terms God is "transcultural," *it being understood* that culture is the activity of man on earth.

We conclude with Professor Mbiti in recalling that "God is beyond human laws, regulations, taboos, prohibitions, customs, traditions, and judgments. Nobody can bring him to court, nobody can charge him with any offence, nobody can take revenge on him, and nobody can harm or hurt him. He is altogether the transcendent OTHER."[54] That is what has emerged from an examination of the African religious beliefs concerning our topic.

51 Cf. NYEME TESE, o.c., pp. 34-47. The mission of nurturing life goes beyond chiefs and parents, to other agents such as the "Nkumi" or the "Nkumi yeekonda" (the Masters or the Masters of the forest), the "Ahoka (the Warriors), the "Ecudi" (Smiths), the "Edimba" (Musicians), and the "Weeci" (healers, fetishists).

52 A. MARTIN DEL MOLINO, o.c., p. 37.

53 J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 13.

54 J.S. MBITI, o.c., p.15.

Professor Mbiti has helped us to reread our traditions concerning the transcendence of God. His analysis appears to us to be complete, precise and suited to our further reflections. God being the Spirit-Creator can only be transcendent. That is, in simple terms, he is distinct and distant from his creatures. We limit ourselves for the moment to these considerations. For it is also true to say that the God of our Ancestors is not completely absent from this "valley of tears."[55] The next section will speak of this.

An Immanent God

Can one, after all the preceding, speak of the immanence of the God of our Ancestors? We have already alluded to this in various words and expressions. Now we present another approach to this reality which emanates from the very projection of God into the nothingness of man.

We proceed by stages. Le "Petit dictionnaire de theologie catholique" defines "immanence" as something which does not go beyond a certain limit. It tells us also that the philosophies of immanence properly speaking are materialism, monism, and pantheism, insofar as they limit the being to what is finite or what can be an object of experience. So in this perspective, one can also call immanentist a philosophy which declares that it is not substantially different from reality and which involves itself in contradictions.[56]

These definitions could appear too brief and undeveloped. But here we want simply to question our Ancestors about what they understand when they speak of an "immanent God." Without hesitation we can say first of all that an essential quality of the Supreme Being is that of being present to the world precisely because it it is he who protects it. On this topic the Bamileké are clear. For them the very name of God means that he is present. "The Supreme Being is the one who not only is never absent, but is the Presence Person, which is why one does not say in Bamileké: 'Sie sie'= God is present, it would be a tautology, but one says directly: 'Sie' = the presence. This name is not given to a person unless by the doubling of a word to designate a reality having a relationship with God."[57]

55 Excerpt from the marial antiphon: "Salve Regina,"

56 Cf. K. RAHNER, o.c., p. 225. *Immanence.*

57 F. EBOUSSI BOULAGA, o.c., p.70. Example: Siewen is the name of a person. It means the providence of a person.

We wish to develop our reflection in two related directions which may, however, appear incompatible.

Immanence as Beneficent Presence

God cannot be taken to be not present to man and to the world. He is "at home" and the man who pretends to "possess the world" is there as an "invader." One could say also "a usurper, a profiteer." He is a "latecomer under the sun." It would therefore be paradoxical and illogical to think that God is absent from the world for even a single instant. Moreover the names that are given to him have this meaning: "Musangana- muenapu," that is (the) one found to be master of the house; "Musangana-muenabio": (the) one acknowledged as the owner of things.[58]

These names affirm the antecedence and the primacy of God in every place, in all space. He is everywhere, already there and man always arrives too late wherever he appears. For God is at home everywhere from all time.[59]

For some African people, God is definitely part of their daily concerns because they are convinced that he can answer their calls for help, solve their problems and turn events in their favour. It is even absurd to think that things could be otherwise. Again, the Bamileké provide us with an eloquent testimony: "God (Sie, present) is acknowledged as so much present that if someone said: "I look for God, or I go towards God", the Bamileké would follow him out of curiosity and take him for a madman who leaves something only a metre away to look for it on the moon."[60]

The presence of God at the side of man has necessarily some consequences for their "mutual relationships." We remember here especially something which corresponds to the fundamental preoccupation of the African, to know life.

58 Cf. O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, *Le Dieu de nos Ancêtres*, in CRA 4 (1970) no. 8, p. 142: "In coming into the world, the African person comes face to face with a cosmos, with countless and often troubling elements. He is conscious of being a late-comer under the sun. "*Panu mpasangana pakole*": The situation under the sun was already difficult (when the man appeared). It repulsive to him to claim an absolute ownership, an absolute right over this vast universe deployed under his eyes and yet without him. His intuition led him logically to read, under the sign of the signs of the cosmos, the signature of Someone who was already there and at once master-of-all. It is this primordial intuition which led African man to give a title to this someone, to "name" him with two names which evoke this first experience of an undefined and strange cosmos."

59 Cf. O. BIMWENYI KWESHI. *Le Dieu de nos Ancêtres*, p. 143.

60 F. EBOUSSI BOULAGA, o.c., p., p. 71.

If God is really present, says the African, I ought to notice it in the acquisition and maintenance of life. And "to facilitate the task of God" in his function as protector of the life of men, the Banyarwanda make a "small opening in the roof of the hut (...) so that Imana can watch the inhabitants and bless them. There is a small hole in the skin used to carry the child on the mother's back, so that Imana can cast his benevolent gaze on the small baby."[61]

For the Bamileké "when a woman becomes pregnant, there will be no reference at all to intercourse, the man and his wife will say to their friends: "God has passed by", "God has visited us." Someone escapes from danger: "God did not allow it." One recovers from an illness, the first exclamation is: "God minsed me well."[62]

One could multiply the witnesses but all affirm the conviction that God is present to all and everywhere, that he penetrates all and renders fertile according to his command. This proximity makes him a "witness" to all that happens in every place. He is present to all that happens everywhere, nothing is hidden or mysterious for him. Everything is naked before him just as the swimmer in the water.[63]

Can one for a single instant imagine man far from God? This proximity is a support, a guarantee and finally an imperative. Without Him man would no longer be what he is; he would be abandoned to every evil power and to the "bad turns" of nature and of his fellow man. In a word, the immanence or the benevolent proximity of God is an African notion. But is this a mediated proximity or an immediate proximity? We have already said that it is immediate for the good and that on the other hand misfortune comes to us through intermediaries. This leads us to the next point.

Immanence as Ambiguous Presence

We must recognize immediately that it is rare that an African assigns the source of his misfortunes to God. We leave aside this problem for the moment. But we say, however, that the proximity of God is sometimes discerned as a threat, in the sense that, being aware of all, he can easily detect the mischief, the lies, the spitefulness of man. In

61 V. MULAGO, o.c., p. 109.

62 F. EBOUSSI BOULAGA, o.c., p. 71

63 Cf. O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, *Discours théologique*, p. 562. God is as "Lupenzu mêsu mu nsona. Mwonso muwenza yêye mumanye," that is "The cockroach observing from under the thatch. Whatever you do he knows it" (Luba).

this case his reaction is not that of waiting. He punishes but always in order to correct and bring man back to the right way.

S.G. Kibicho informs us that "God's presence was also felt negatively through calamities such as diseases and epidemics among men as well as animals, droughts, and famines, national defeat in wars or raids, and supremely through death. Thunder and lightning had a very special places as demonstrations of God's presence and activity, because they come directly from God himself."[64]

In all the situations defined above man would have preferred that God is not so near him for he always considers these situations as cautions which could lead to death if man persists in his disobedience to his laws. God takes the African with his weak side, knowing his very natural attachment to life in order to obtain his fidelity.

Even in these painful moments God is presumed to be near even though he does not prevent these difficult moments. The African notes this, not without regret. The proximity of God is to him so natural that even when his foot strikes a stone, he first invokes the name of God.[65]

The best synthesis to express the proximity of God cares from Professor Mbiti: "The immanence of God is seen paradoxically as benevolent and dangerous, welcome and unwanted."[66] In the one case as in the other, God is immanent, present, close, for he does not depend on what man thinks of his presence. He "is so present that a child of three years objected one day to his father who told him to finish his food: "If I don't finish my food, God will eat the rest; is he not everywhere?"[67]

The section which follows will help us to reconcile faith in a transcendent God and faith in an immanent God.

A Transcendentally Immanent God

"The African God is a God *transcendentally immanent.* He is a God who, without identifying himself in history, governs and acts in the universe by his act of creation and of order."[68] EIoi Messi Metogo

64 S. G. KIBICHO, o.c., p. 227. The author continues: "When a man was struck by lightning he was believed to have been struck directly by God himself for daring to look at God directly, or for some other kind of irreverence or disobedience..." (p. 228).

65 Cf. L.V. THOMAS, o.c., p. 141. He mentions, in paraphrase I. PAHIZI. *Les noms théophores chez les Kabiyedina du N. Togo,* in *Afrique et parole* (1972) no. 39-40, p. 25.

66 J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 16.

67 F. EBOUSSI BOULAGA, o.c., p. 71.

68 E.J. PENOUKOU, o.c., p. 87. The author underlines.

suggests exactly the same when he affirms that the African is launched in "a history where God occupies the heart, for the God of the black African is transcendentally immanent."[69]

As for F. Eboussi Boulaga, "the transcendence is so close that it sparkles, here and there, in luminous signals in the night of immanence."[70]

In reality we could have retained only this double mode of God's presence to the world. For the two realities go together and are complementary, the one calling forth the other. It is true to say that transcendence has nothing to do with remoteness. This mistake has slipped into human thought by confusing the invisibility of God with his absence.[71] The two attributes, immanence and transcendence, taken separately, certainly do not translate the authentic African understanding of God.

Indeed God is grasped globally as *both near and distant*.[72] Unfortunately the human mind grasps them necessarily one after the other, as being two distinct aspects of the same reality. It looks as though God was transcendent in some circumstances and immanent in others. This dichotomy is only formal, fortunately.

L.V. Thomas expresses this formal opposition in the shape of a question which answers itself: "Are we then in the presence of two traditions perfectly foreign to one another? On the one hand, a God who is claimed to be distant and whose remoteness is willed as the very condition for the birth of the human person. On the other hand, a God whose name is always on one's lips and whom one thinks of spontaneously in the thousand worries, fortunes and misfortunes which are the lot of human life. In fact there is no formal opposition and the paradox is perhaps, in actual fact the path which leads him closer to the mystery of a God at the same time familiar and inaccessible. Man, in his everyday life succeeds in reconciling what would seem to us irreconciliable."[73]

69 E. MESSI METOGO, *Quelle vie Jésus apporte-t-il aux africains?* in *Pâques Africaines aujourd'hui*, Paris 1989, p. 128, cited by KISIMBA NYEMBO, *La foi chrétienne face aux célébrations africaines de la mort*, in *Interpellations et croissance de la foi*, Kinshasa, 1992, p.168.

70 F. EBOUSSI BOULAGA, *Christianisme sans fétiche*, Paris, 1981, p. 106.

71 Cf. B. MUZUNGU, *Le Dieu de nos pères*, vol. 3, p. 47.

72 We give to the adjective "distant" a meaning quite other than geographical or spatial. We take it as in social relationships where the more important person must keep a certain reserve (restraint) due to his social rank as recognized by society. Not that he must be haughty and despise the others, but on the other hand he builds their pride through the good human relations that he maintains. Such a term applied to God would be a limping analogy but close enough to African thought.

73 L.V. THOMAS, o.c., p. 41. One can also read with profit: J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 12 and 16; KAGARAGU Ntabaza, *Les croyances religieuses des Bashi à travers les proverbes*, in

The "cohabitation," if one can express it like this, between a transcendent God and an immanent God does not restrict the Greatness of God. On the contrary through and beyond his presence he remains the wholly Other, the Stranger, the Inaccessible. It is a "presence not to be grasped, not to be mastered, which gives and takes back, constantly in the process of coming, constantly in process of leaving."[74]

Professor Bimwenyi compares this situation to that of the sun which is distant and inaccessible, yet resplendent and at the same time near and familiar.[75] This picture seems to us to render better, *mutatis mutandis*, our African faith in a God transcendent in theory but immanent in practice.[76]

But how does this translate concretely in the daily life of the African? Let us put the question another way. Does this kind of "absent presence" of God[77] manifest itself in the pre-occupations and the daily concerns of the African, in knowing how to acquire, strengthen and maintain life? Certainly! God is present in all the outcomes, the blessings, the names that one gives to children, the proverbs, the tales, the myths, through which there is emphasized both the presence of God and his "remote greatness."

In a word we could say that the remoteness of God does not exclude his proximity, that immanence and transcendence meet in him without any dichotomy or confusion and that finally everything comes down to the affirmation that "God is far beyond human search and reach, but paradoxically he is so near that he 'sits on the back of' every one of us'."[78] We go from paradox to paradox. God sits on the back of each of us, invisible not only to us, which is normal for one in that position, but also by others, those who can see our back. We approach this as a mystery.

CRA 10 (1976) no. 19, p. 141; V. MULAGO, o.c., p. 99: "Nzambi est vraiment Nzambi," with all that this says; NYEME TESE, o.c., p. 38.

74 O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, , p. 582, also See the p. 570.

75 Cf O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, *Discours théologique*, p. 556-557: The sun is the star which presides during the day. By its heat it contributes to the fertility of the earth, abode of mortals for whom it provides the rhythm for life and the cycle of the seasons. It exercises thus vital and fundamental functions which it carries out in a close and familiar way. However, at the same time, it keeps its distance both by its own inaccessible symbolic space (on high) and by its blinding splendour. Near and far, familiar and distant, it synthesizes all that religious experience allows us to say of God." See also pp. 554 and 561.

76 Cf. J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 17. *"Ma foi d'africain"* is the title of a book of J.M. Ela (cf. above). S.G. KIBICHO, o.c., p. 232, also gives a good description of the same.

77 Cf. L.V. THOMAS, o.c., p. 146.

78 Cf. Also L.V. THOMAS, o.c., p. 142; V. MULAGO, *Le Dieu des Bantu,* in CRA 2 (1968) no. 3, pp. 34-38; D. NOTHOMB, *Signification religieuse des récits* in CRA 10 (1976) no. 19, p. 19.

An Invisible God

It will be easier if we return to this notion which we have spoken about above of "A transcendent God." An invisible God is, it seems to us, a consequence of the idea that God is inaccessible. Since it is admitted by all that God is a spirit, he is by that very fact conceived as invisible. There is a consensus about this question everywhere in Africa, as Professor Mbiti tells us.[79]

All the African peoples are unanimous in saying that no one ever saw God.[80] The African, daringly, tries to get around this difficulty. He says to himself that it is true that God is invisible but that he is very easily perceived when it is a matter of his "felt presence" through his acts, through natural phenomena such as fire, moon, sun, lightning, forest, water.

In some African societies there is a firm belief that it is fatal to see God. Such is the case with the Bambuti.[81] Why is this so? J.S. Mbiti thinks that it is because the eyes of man are too weak to see God and that whoever tries to have a look at him must die.[82] The only case where a man could see God is, it seems, when he is on the point of dying. This is what the Lugbara, among others, believe: " God is invisible, but in his immanent aspect he may become visible to a man who is about to die. They hold that should a healthy person see him, he would know that soon he would die, for God is very terrifying to see."[83]

Certainly the African always has the audacity to go further. He imagines some privileged moments when one could see God, only when one is leaving for the land of our Ancestors. An "invisible God is situated in the very logic of a "God who is all and who gives all" and of a "man who is nothing, has nothing, and who receives all."

Can we now close our first chapter? From a transcendent God to an invisible God, by way of a God who is transcendentally immanent, we have paved the way for the continuation of our theme.

The African person "although having very beautiful ideas about God and his activity, has to admit that God remains a mystery, the

79 J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 26.

80 Cf. F. EBOUSSI BOULAGA, Dieu en Afrique, p. 71: "*Dans aucun cas personne ne dit: 'J ai vu Dieu, ou il avait telle couleur ou telle taille.'*" Cf. also J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 25.

81 Cf. J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 25.

82 Cf. J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 25: ." the eyes of a man are too feeble to see God, and he who dares to catch a glimpse of God must die, as God is too terrifying for human endurance!"

83 Cf. J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 25. "The Bakongo have statues, fetishes by the hundred, which represent men, animals, spirits, but none represent Nzambi," simply because no one has a picture, an idea of him (V. MULAGO, *La religion traditionnelle*, p. 99).

wholly Other that one cannot know or understand entirely, once and for all."[84] He is not concerned to "grasp intellectually" the Transcendent, whom he has nevertheless tried to "name and to qualify." But these expressions fall short of what God really is. They are moreover in a relational and analogous sphere. Despite his benevolent presence, God remains the Impenetrable one.[85]

In the end, one does not know what he is exactly, even if one has recourse to him in situations of distress and despair. Hence the embarrassment of a Mukongo when asked who God is. He immediately answers: "We don't know who Nzambi is", or else "Nzambi, he is Nzambi." But then if one insists: "Is he a man, an ancestor chief, the sun, the moon, a spirit of the waters?" he will shrug his shoulders and say: "Nzambi, he is Nzambi," or again "Who has seen Nzambi?"[86]

It is with this profession of faith of the Bakongo that we bring to an end this preliminary step. This allows us to approach with confidence the next part of our journey, which will lead us into the world of the expectations that nourish man in his dealings with God.

II.
The Expectations of the African Vis-à-vis the God of Our Ancestors

We begin these lines with a reflection of Mircea Eliade. To one who has seen its relevance and its realism it seems useful to reproduce it entirely, because it can clarify the points that we propose to develop in this section.

Let us listen to M. Eliade: "Men remember Heaven and the supreme divinity only when a danger coming from the "heavenly" regions threatens them directly; the rest of the time, their religiosity is inspired by their daily needs and their practices and their devotion

84 F. EBOUSSI BOULAGA, *Dieu en Afrique*, p. 78.

85 Cf. B. MUZUNGU, *Le Dieu de nos pères*, vol 3, p.45: "One piece of evidence which is obvious is that Imana is not one being among many other realitiesin this universe. No words will suffice to present him in a spatio-temporal form. Anthropomorphisms never go beyond the symbolic level. Yes he speaks, he hears, he punishes, he rewards, etc. But the concrete world of his activity remains invisible."

86 Cf. V. MULAGO, *La religion traditionnelle*, p. 99.

turn towards the powers who control these same needs. It is very obvious that this does not decrease the autonomy, the greatness, the primacy of the supreme Celestial beings. It is moreover evident that the "primitive" man, as well as the "civilized" man, forgets them easily enough when he has no more need of them; that the harshness of existence compels him to look more to earth than to heaven, and that he discovers the importance of heaven only when death threatens from below."[87]

The relationships that the African maintains with God are functional and the attributes or qualities that he gives to him are analogical, because they have their background in human relationships. The relationship God-Man-African expresses a "recognition of our dependence of God; of worship and of thanksgiving for life, the understanding and all the benevolence of this world put at our disposal, and the gifts coming through the mediation of the creatures which constitute the existential environment of man."[88]

The African turns his gaze, "demanding" and confident", towards God as Providence and Creator and as Father, author and support of life. He cries out in a filial abandonment that is not easily discouraged in the face of all the enemies of life." What does he offer in return to this God who loves him? We will not anticipate, but will come to that little by little.

God: Creator and Provider

God as Creator

The fact that it is God who created our universe does not need proof. Much has been written on this topic.[89] We will not launch into polemics about cosmic myths, even if there are such things, for this is neither the place nor the time. We simply note, with the African, that our world *is* and that it has a Creator.[90]

We accept, for the purpose of our case, the point of view of Professor Mulago who spares us this long discussion. For him, indeed, God created the world from his own will, and from him was born the original energy which grew and which was progressively transformed to

87 M. ELIADE, *Treaty of history of the religions*, Paris, 1949, p. 56-57.
88 B. MUZUNGU, Theology of the creation, p. 11.
89 *Le Centre d'Etudes des Religions Africaines*, (CERA) is a real data bank in this matter.
90 Cf. BUAKASA Tkm, o.c., p. 30-32.

give birth to the universe and then to the beings who inhabit it. It is thus that the universe is his work and belongs to him.[91]

The underlying idea of this reflection is that God created everything real, all that is, including man, "*ex nihilo,*" that is starting from nothing. And P. Tempels has noted this already.[92] Without being expressed explicitly, this concept is found in all African religious traditions. This has been established already and we need not return there. The witnesses are many. We mention in passing the Bahunde of Zaire. They "believe in the existence one Supreme Being, invisible Spirit, itself uncreated, Creator, Master and Lord of all that exists. They call him 'Lulema,' the Creator; 'Lugira,' the great Creator, the great possessor, Bugingo (the life)."[93]

God alone is Creator. He alone gives life and sustains it. Nothing that is escapes him, so that it is nonsense to think of a world without God, that is without the one who made it. All is the product of his will alone, even, and in a privileged way, the life of man, according to J.C. Malengu.[94]

But God did not abandon the world to its sad fate. This idea is found everywhere in traditional African belief. This action of God who continues to create through allowing the birth of new beings and through keeping them in existence and in life, is called in Africa the Providence of God.[95]

God as Providence

We have the impression of turning full circle. Our intelligence can only grasp little by little a reality which is so far beyond it. We have

91 Cf. V. MULAGO, *La religion traditionnelle*, p. 67. Quoted and explained by BUAKASA, o.c., p. 30.

92 Cf. P. TEMPELS, *La philosophie bantoue, Paris*, 1949, p. 39. Concerning creation "ex nihilo," J.S. MBITI, o.c., p.45, also remarks that "concerning the origin of creation, they (all African people) say, 'There was nothing before God created the world'. This is a clear belief that God created the world *ex nihilo* (out of nothing)." (It is the author who underlines).

93 L. VIAENE, *La religion des Bahunde* (Kivu), in *Kongo-Overzee* 18 (1952) no. 5, p. 388. We make some corrections here: "Luyira" in place of "Lugira"; "Buyingo" in place of "Bugingo." The author has put the "g" in place of "y" under the influence of Kihavu, a language of the eastern Zaire neighboring the Kihunde.

94 Cf. J.C. MALENGU, *Le Dieu des Bantous est-il un Dieu-Père*? In RCA 22 (1967) no. 5, p. 526. Cf also WASWANDI KAKULE o.c., p.253; A. KAGAME, *La philosophie Bantu comparée*, Paris, 1976, p. 292-293; B. MUZUNGU, *Perspectives eschatologiques*, p. 182; O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, *Discours théologique*, p. 549.

95 Cf B. MUZUNGU, *Théologie de la création*, p. 8.

stated at the end of the previous section what Professor Muzungu meant by providence. We can only stay with that, and in reality it is this notion that the African has preserved concerning the work of creation. Indeed the "initial creation" is prolonged in the "continuous and present creation." This is joined to the idea of providence among the Africans.[96]

The idea of God as Providence permeates the whole life of an African. All the good that comes to him is included in the plan or "concern" of the Creator, which is to develop the life that he gave him and to help him to transmit it.

This shows clearly in the names given to the children born in some very peculiar circumstances. Among the Bahunde, for example, a child who arrives in the world unexpectedly is named "Mbalibukira" or again "Muhanuka" "the-one-who-fell-from-the-sky."

We find the same experience among the Banyarwanda-Barundi, according to the testimonies gathered by P.B. Muzungu and D. Nothomb.[97] The latter says among others that "when omnipotence and totally free munificence are joined to infallibility, they constitute Providence. The fate of man, especially, remains in the hands of God. An unfailing Providence, doubtless, but one that requires the activity of man."[98]

All these professions of traditional African faith are very significant. They affirm in fact the immanence of God in terms of a permanent presence in the world and above all (and this is most interesting) in the life and thought of the African. God has never left the world and man. On the contrary, he reinforces his presence through the coming into the world, every day, of new beings. God is not satisfied with creating the universe and then letting it 'function' all alone and independently of Him. This conviction constitutes one of the fundamental dogmas of the faith of our Ancestors. The universe is sustained, organized and oriented through the providential action of Imana. Everything that is good derives, in the last resort, from Imana.[99]

96 We borrow these expressions from Professor Muzungu, *Théologie de la création*, p. 7-8.

97 Cf. D. NOTHOMB, *L'homme et Dieu*, p. 902; B. MUZUNGU, *Le Dieu de nos pères* Vol. 1.

98 D. NOTHOMB, *L'homme et Dieu*, p. 80. Faith in the Providence of God is found also in J.C. MALENGU, o.c., p. 526: "Maweja Nangila"= God-Providence; BUAKASA Tkm, o.c., p. 31: The world-creator God is presented simultaneously as Providence and Wisdom; J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 51 and 56: among the Abaluyia, the Dorobo, the Gikuyu, the Ewe, the Kiga, the Ankore, the Twi ...

99 Cf B. MUZUNGU, *Le Dieu de nos pères* Vol. 2, p. 31. Here the author explains what Professor Mbiti has said more briefly: "A number of peoples hold that God has not stopped his creative activity. The Twi say that "God never ceases to create things," o.c., p. 52.

Before closing this section we remember that God-Providence needs the activity of man for continuing the work of bringing new beings to life. And moreover for man himself God requires his involvement for his own well-being. "Providence comes down from heaven like a fine rain, but she won't meet you if you sleep in your house. Providence is not easy-going, she is demanding for those who want to benefit from her."[100]

This note goes against the complacent attitude of "wait-and-see" which characterizes some people and even some popular mentalities, of just waiting passively for God. God-Providence, yes; God the only actor, no. Man plays the "secondary role" of collaborator with God in the work of maintaining beings in their existence and in their life. We now make this notion more precise.

The Living God Who Gives Life

When an African speaks of life, he never thinks of something abstract, metaphysical, but rather of the flesh (mwili, mnofu), the bones (mifupa), the blood (damu), united in an identifiable and animate shape by the breath (pumzi).[101] The whole constitutes man and it is then he who names the other animate beings, made of the same elements but inferior to him.

So to the word "biogene" (source of life) we give the etymological significance of "the one who gives life," "the one who bears the germ of life." Applied to God this word translates our African thought exactly.

F. Eboussi Boulaga noticed that "the Bamileké knows that he is what he is or has what he possesses thanks to an all powerful invisible being. The pursuit of life implies for him the desire of the author of this life. A polygamist becomes one not just so that he can one day write with a note of thanksgiving: 'I am drowned in the good God.' For him the charms of his wives are simply theophanies."[102]

Theophanies! That maybe forcing it a little, but the basis of this jocular statement is the conviction that God gives all, absolutely all.

[100] WASWANDI KAKULE, o.c., p. 258: among the Nande of Zaire and moreover also among their neighbors the Bahunde, God is called, among other names, "Hangi", the Provident God. The Professor quotes G. DIETERLEN, *Textes sacrés d'Afrique*, Paris, 1965, p. 20.

[101] These words come from Swahili

[102] F. EBOUSSI BOULAGA, *Dieu en Afrique*, p. 71.

He gives without counting and without discrimination.

The life that the African expects from God is not in the first place a "spiritual" life, but first and always concrete possessions. This is summarized in three short words: offspring or progeny (uzao, in Kiswahili), longevity (maisha marefu) and finally wealth (utajiri).

Professor Bimwenyi shares with us a few lines of African wisdom, which confirm that all comes from God:

1. "Mulopo a- cipapayi - Upapa ne mici mwiitu" (Luba).
   God is a magnificent donor - Who gives even to the trees in the forest.
2. (Mvidya) Kambi kupa - Wamona ne: m-mujile (Luba).
   (God) begins to give himself? You could believe that it is to rid himself of something.
3. (Maweja) Kumulombi - Utu wakupa cipaapa" (Luba).
   (God) He does not ask for anything! (do you ask Him for something?) He gives to you without counting (he fills you to overflowing).[103]

"Sometimes the hand which receives becomes too small to contain the gifts of God."[104] For the African, life is an inexhaustible theme. One could speak of it at length for days without tiring. No activity of the African person has any meaning unless it leads to it being lived, to acquiring and maintaining life, or to the transmission of life. It comes to the same thing, for man receives life only to give it again.

"So this God (life), Professor Nyeme Tese tells us, becomes a 'mission' in the hands of man (lotumu), which requires constant effort on his part, an ardent and active desire to be, in the community of the living, an agent, a member who encourages, respects and elicits respect for Life: 'monga memenkana', that is to make of oneself a man integrated and irreproachable in an active life for the benefit of the community. This mission of man is to be generous and to bear fruit, for it means to welcome, carry, keep, guarantee, encourage and 'optimize' life in oneself and in the world."[105]

One of the symbols of life is blood. This explains why the African has a horror of "blood shed for nothing," which is probably what drives him to avenge the innocent. The shedding of the blood of a person is an attack on life for blood is the vehicle of life, it is life.[106]

[103] O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, , p. 566.
[104] O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, *Discours théologique*, p. 567.
[105] NYEME TESE, o.c., p. 30-31. The author adds that "la vie est le don par excellence de Dieu. "Life is the gift per excellence of God" (on the same page) The Black African parent and the whole community is aware of giving a solid and balanced education, sole guarantee of seeing life perpetuate itself on the earth in better conditions.
[106] NYEME TESE, o.c., p. 32. The practice of blood-pact probably derives from this concept.

Every society is organized for the promotion of life: so that all can participate in the "struggle for life", individual and communal. All the structures, socio-political and religious, must be part of this vital dynamic if they are not to be dysfunctional[107]).

If we return very briefly to what was said above about God as Providence, we will remember that God wanted created beings to assist him in the perpetuation of his work. This leads us then to speak of "mediators," or "intermediaries" in the divine will to give life. These intermediaries are multiple, but man is the privileged "partner" of God in this life-giving work.

Mediators as Transmitters of Life

At the apex of these transmitters of life there are the Ancestors. These are the living dead who first received life from the Creator and then transmitted it to us. They "constitute the most elevated chain linking humanity to God. They are the first ones to whom God communicated his life force; they are the ones nearest to God to intensify that life and for every clan they are as an image, a personification of God."[108] But who is an Ancestor in Africa? It is a key word in traditional African religion. It is therefore useful and necessary to know exactly who can be called an Ancestor. We will be brief and precise, and furthermore we will return to the idea a little farther on in this chapter.

An Ancestor is first of all a dead person, it does not matter who. He must have participated "actively and personally" in the life of the clan, of the tribe. Thus, after their death, not all the dead have the same status. The Dead are not all Ancestors. The Ancestors are those dead who achieved something, those eminent dead whose passage through this world left a positive mark on history. The term "ancestor" is then a glorious title of victory over the evil events of life. The Ancestors are those dead who have entered death through the transforming funeral rites of the village."[109] The example of their deeds is a stimulus, an encouragement to persevere in the struggle for life.[110]

[107] Cf V. MULAGO, *Un visage africain du christianisme*, Paris, 1962, p. 115. Cf also NYEME TESE, o.c., p. 42

[108] V. MUPITA BALIKI, *Le Christ Proto-Ancêtrer*, Kinshasa, 1980, p. 69. We borrow the expression "living dead" from J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 230.

[109] V. MUPITA BALIKI, o.c., p. 62. The author continues, on the same page saying that "this status of ancestor is the most important and constitutes the ideal, main orientation of the African for human destiny and the final goal of human development."

[110] Cf. J.M. ELA, *Une question africaine*, in *Concilium* 122 (1977) p. 49.

At the head of all the Ancestors is the Ancestor who is the origin of the tribe. He is supposed to have received life directly from God. In his turn, he transmitted it to all his descendants; the lineage of the ancestors, parents, the old, the senior members, those with responsibility, the chiefs. "All these agents" of life," have received it from the "primordial ancestor"[111] or again from the "Proto-Ancestor.[112]

One can claim the title of Proto-Ancestor or primordial Ancestor only if one has passed his life on earth in "sowing life" not only by "biological fertility" but also by "biogenic" actions and words. For the true realization of a *muntu* is to accomplish this plan of life of God and of the Ancestor, Professor Nyeme tells us.[113]

Belief in the existence of intermediaries in black Africa is of capital importance. It is the very foundation of a traditional African theology founded on the greatness, the goodness, the condescension of God. He does not preserve life for his own sake, but to allow all beings to participate in it, and in the first place human beings. They become in their turn "missionaries of life" and are convinced that they are nothing else but instruments of "the one who is Life."[114] So much do they believe that life comes from someone other and passes through them according to the will and the plan of God, as Professor Kabasele tells us.[115]

In this perspective there are then some people who are excluded from the number of the Ancestors despite their virtuous life here on earth. They are those who die without leaving offspring. They were useless during their life, for they did not transmit the life that they themselves had received.

This exclusion from the community of the Ancestors has serious consequences. Indeed, these dead, having lived a useless life on earth, will not receive any respect, or any familial or tribal commemoration. So: "One can have a beautiful and virtuous life (a holy priest, a holy nun), but if one did not beget, one cannot have access to the rank of bantu ancestor."[116]

111 Cf. NYEME TESE, o.c., p. 32 and 41.
112 Cf. B. BUJO, *Le diaire d'un théologien africain*, Kinshasa, 1987, p. 26. Professor Bujo applies the expression to Jesus.
113 Cf. NYEME TESE, o.c., p. 41. The word "biogène" is a neologism adopted by us as appropriate to express the "origin of life," "source of !ife," "generator of life."
114 Cf. WASWANDI KAKULE, o.c., p.255 and 268.
115 Cf. Fr KABASELE, *Le Christ comme Ancêtre et Aîné*, in Fr ĶABASELE ea, o.c., p. 132.
116 Fr KABASELE, *L'au-delà des modèles*, in Fr KABASELE, o.c., p. 218.

To conclude our reflection on the role of the intermediaries in the transmission of life, we paraphrase Professor Kabasele in saying that the Ancestors are our "origins" from whence we draw the life that we must ourselves transmit to our descendants. This allows us to be counted one day among the Ancestors.[117] Such is the faith of our Ancestors in God who gives Life, such is our faith.

Our work would be incomplete if we did not speak of another aspect of life, the transition from this world of earthly beings to that of the living dead, otherwise called the great departure toward "erunga," the home of the dead.[118]

Death

We will not take up here a sociological study of death. It would be interesting, but would require a much larger work centered on this theme. We will not speak of death as negation of life, as a threat coming to darken the terrestrial horizon of the life of *muntu*. However we will return there very briefly in the following section. But now we can already present the notion that death is sometimes taken as the end of all hope of longevity and at the same time as an opening to a full life close to the Ancestors. This last occurs to the degree that one was "fertile" on earth in the sense of transmitting life.

"Death is the door that allows to enter into the fullness of the life of the Ancestors those who led on earth an irreproachable life," affirms Professor Kisimba Nyembo.[119]

Our approach to death is operational. On the one hand it comes to shake, from top to bottom, the whole of the black African concept of

[117] Cf. Fr KABASELE, *Le Christ comme Ancêtre et Aîné*, p. 32. The author relates his own experience of what the Bantu consider as the greatest misfortune which could befall them and then suggests that to give life is to love. An extraordinary vision of things: "The greatest curse for a *Muntu* would be to die without a child. To live is to give life, the more one gives life, the more one increases his capacity of being. To love is to give ... it is a matter of a life that is biological and spiritual and even temporal, for among the Bantu, these are intimately bound together. Indeed, when one encourages communion in a social group, when one sows peace and love there, one is an ally of life, one is a giver of life. But this gift does not reach its fullness that with the biological aspect" (on the same page).
Concerning the role of the Ancestors in the life of the terrestrial living, one could read with fruit B. MUZUNGU, *Le Dieu des nos pères*, Vol. 3, p. 59-60.

[118] Among the Bahunde of eastern Zaire, this word means "the home of the dead, the place where all look alike, those who have "left us." But the first meaning is "volcano," - "erunga" (singular); "birunga" (plural). In Goma this word became "Virunga" one doesn't know how (probably by slip of "bi" toward "vi"). Hence " Virunga National Park."

[119] KISIMBA NYEMBO, o.c., p. 160.

life and of the world that we have just described above; it threatens inevitably both man and the world.[120] On the other hand, it is unavoidable for every person.

Of course it plunges family and friends into grief, but it is not the end of life. On the contrary it prolongs it.[121]

E.J. Penoukou describes this African vision of history very appropriately as "protology" and "eschatology." These two realities are two aspects of the same unique reality, life.[122]

We think it is this entry to life in company with the Ancestors which very often motivates the African to face death with optimism, especially when he cannot reproach himself with anything, neither with regard to the living dead nor with regard to the terrestrial living. The conviction that death is a necessary and mandatory transition to life also reassures the survivors who can henceforth count on a possible new intercessor.

We should speak briefly about those who are not received into "erunga." Those dead who left this world childless, are banished from the community through a curse. The Bahunde of eastern Congo call them "Bishwasi," a word that means "rogue spirits, malevolent" (in the singular: Kishwasi). They are dangerous for terrestrial living.

This brief survey leads us to the conclusion that "death includes a 'Pascal' dimension. One dies in order to find life."[123] This allows us to pass on to another expectation of the African vis-à-vis a Father-God.

God as Father

Again our approach will be functional. The African considers God as a father in the sense of "giver of life," we would say even of "generator" as "origin, source of life." Certainly the theme of life among Africans is found in all their relationships, in everything they do and say, whether to increase life or to decrease it and sometimes to suppress it.

We agree with Professor Bimwenyi that God is not Father in the "biological" meaning of the term. But as with parents he is Father inasmuch as he is source of life, origin of life. But more so and better

120 Cf. NYEME TESE, o.c., p. 32 and 33.
121 For more information one can consult V. MUPITA B. o.c., p. 60.
122 Cf E.J. PENOUKOU, *Eschatologie en terre africane*, in *Lumière et Vie* 31 (1982) no. 159, p. 75-88.
123 V. MUPITA BALIKI, o.c., p. 61.

than they he is the source in its totality, he is the effective power able to put life in its totality into the world."[124]

This theme of the fatherhood of God can be deduced, from faith in a God who is Creator and Provider. Why the term "Father" in preference to any other? We think that it is because in the African mentality the role of father in the gift of life is irreplaceable. And then in a society dominated by man, it is normal that he has recourse to categories which express the place occupied by the father in the family and society. Analogically, we can give this name "father" to any being who is a model person, fertile, strong, stable, good, wise ... If a mortal person who is only a "secondary cause" in the transmission of life can be called father, a fortiori the term applies also to God, who is origin, source of life.

Fr. D. Nothomb provides us with some evidence "If one gives the name of father, by metaphor, to the distributor of all that is good, to the Creator of men, to the one who decides their fate and who comes to their help with goodness and pity, then, yes God is a father. If one calls father the one who loves those to whom he gives so much, then also God is really father. Because of his generous love towards men he must be."[125]

Professor Nbonyinkebe has collected names of God which express his Fatherhood: "Sebantu" (Kinyarwanda), "The Father of men." Because "Habyara Imana, abantu bakarera" Truly, God only begets, men can only educate. "Ishe wabantu n'ebintu" (Mashi) Father of men and of things.[126]

The testimony of the African tradition on the designation of God as Father, can be found elsewhere in Africa. It is earily explicable in the context of the link between life and the idea of fatherhood. These two

[124] O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, *Discours théologique*, p. 539. Professor Bimwenyi on the same page gives these details: As the Ancestor or the Father, God is "mfuki," source, origin, outpouring." "Tatu Mufuki wa byonso" = father-Creator of all things. "Tatu Muledi" = father who gave birth. This last designation is the one which is essential for the human fatherhood. But this is understood as more than a modality: Father of someone through initiation in a ritual, to a mystery (Cf. note 54 to page 539).

[125] O. NOTHOMB, *Man and God*, p. 58.

[126] Cf. MBONYINKEBE *Sebahire, Brèves réflections sur le conception traditionnelle du péché en Afrique Centrale*, in CRA 8 (1974) no 16, p. 154. Among the Bahunde one speaks of "Shabandu" or "Shebandu"; "She" the father of; "bandu" (or singular "mundu")= men. The situation is the same among the Nkundo according to V. MULAGO, *La religion traditionnelle*, p. 12; among the Nande of Zaïre according to W. KWANDI Kakule, o.c., p. 529; Father-God is called "Musyakulu," among the Luba according to J.C. MALENGU, o.c., p. 515-527: the Father-God is called "Mvindi Mukulu," "Maweja Tshiama wa"; among the Sereer according to H. GRAVRAND, *La prière Sereer* in CRA 11 (1977) no 21-22, p. 114-115; Father-God is called Sène etc.

realities are intimately bound together. Indeed one is father because one is source of life for someone, whether that life is biological or spiritual.

We have already remarked that when the African calls God "Father", it is always in relation to creation. In addition to the people mentioned already elsewhere in this course, we are indebted to Professor Mbiti for other examples of the same kind among many African peoples: the Lunda, the Bemba, the Herero, the Ndebele, the Shona, the Chawai, the Azande, the Bambuti, the Tswana, the Gikuyu.[127]

The question is so important that there are people who do not hesitate to use the expression "son of God." We get this information from Professor Mbiti. It is the case for example with the Bambuti and the Bavenda. The Shilluk honor their king with titles such as "the first born of God," "Child of God, reflexion of the ancestors," "master of the world," "last born of God."[128]

A minor curiosity is to be noted. J.S. Mbiti found a belief in a son of God among the Balese: "The Balese say that God has a son who knows all the thoughts of God and who decides for the good or ill of them."[129]

We do not state that these investigations have an absolute material value, but the results they give confirm a firm faith in a Father-God. It is incontestable. This doctrine of traditional African religion corresponds exactly to the idea that the African has of God and of life. From there to conclude that in Africa Father-God is life, is a step which is quickly taken.

Unfortunately it is not so easy, a pleasant, but necessary to take account of the "enemies of life." There also the African expects the intervention of God.

God-Conqueror of the Hostile Powers in Human Life

Life is taken here in its fuller sense, that is a life filled with children, riches, longevity, friends. It is not enough to have been born and to find oneself as if by chance and almost with regret in this world of the earthly living. A life like this is less than that of the dead. A Hunde

127 Cf. J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 91-92.
128 Cf. J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 93. The Akan on the other hand honor God as "the Great Ancestor" (the same page).
129 J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 83a.

proverb says: "Ebusha bitwe epfa kabiri," "To lack wealth, possessions, is to die twice."

The Powers Hostile to Life

Africa identifies whole range of these powers. To mention some: all forms of illness, barrenness, parasites, the many natural calamities (drought, floods, landslides, volcanic eruptions, erosion, devastating locusts, lightning, earthquakes.), social factions, jealousy, hatred, gossip, hateful words, malevolent spirits, sorcery, black magic, poison.

Today one could add the suffering brought about by modern civilizations: dictatorship, authoritarianism, exploitation of the poor by the rich, inequalities and social injustices, depersonalization of human beings, slums or shantytowns, dissolute living, juvenile and senile delinquency, corruption, violation of fundamental human rights, savage repression, neocolonialism and its "humanitarian aid," neo-slavery. The list is long. Against all these ills, the African expects some action on the part of God. These diverse situations trouble him and point to the fragility, the finiteness and the precariousness of his life.[130] Man is constantly torn between good and evil, life and death, yes and no.[131]

Professor Bimwenyi expresses this dialectic by saying that "mortal man does not exercise his humanness so much in smiling as in weeping."[132]

Their Origin

A serious problem to identify the origin of all these powers that are destructive of life. Some people frankly affirm that it is God who sends them, for it is he who is master of all; his kingdom extends to everything created, even to these powers contrary to life. For those who hold this belief, God, being the author of good and evil, sends both happiness and misfortune.[133] According to them all the misfortunes

130 Cf L.V. THOMAS, o.c., p. 127.

131 Cf B. ADOUKONOU, *Jalons pour une théologie africaine*, Paris, 1980, p. 217-218.

132 O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, *Discours théologique*, p. 586. However, says the author, insofar as we exist, we are in a "suspended death", prey to the waiting-list of the 'petite terre rouge,' that is to say, death (p. 589). That is, even if we are drawn to wholeness and safety, there are situations that are dangerous and deadly, that can only be partly overcome. (The same idea is developed on pp. 590-591).

133 Cf V. MULAGO, Le Dieu des Bantu. in CRA 2 (1968) no 3, p. 36, 37, 57; Th. TSHIBANGU, *Problématique d'une pensée religieuse africaine*, in CRA 2 (1968) no. 3, p.15; H. HOCHEGGER *La mort et le culte des morts chez les populations d'expression teke*, in CRA 4 (1970) no. 7, p. 82; E. MUJINYA, *Le mal et le fondement dernier de la morale, Ethics*, in CRA 3 (1969) no. 5, p. 61; TSHIMALENGA Ntumba, *La vision Ntu de l'homme*, in CRA 8 (1976) no 16, p. 179.

which happen to man are attributable to God. But the inexplicable misfortunes are also assigned directly to God (sleeping sickness, plague).

However Professor Mulago tells us: "Misfortune could be willed by God for a "medicinal" reason.[134] On the other hand some people believe that the God who gave life, happiness, and other goods of this world could not be a source of misfortune. It would be a flagrant contradiction. He who created the world by his goodness and without expecting anything in return, could he send these evils contrary to what he has given.[135]

This last explanation appears to us more logical, more coherent and therefore more justifiable. Indeed it would be absurd that God is the basis and the source of happiness and at the same time the source of misfortune. Unless, in his impenetrable plan he does not want to lead man towards a greater good through such a trial, that being death.

But we have to recognize that we do not possess African traditions able to inform us of any purificatory power of suffering and misfortune. However, from misfortune or misadventure, the African draws a lesson for the future, as in the Swahili proverb: "Mwenye kovu haliwai na kidonda," that is "Scars don't forget the wound."[136]

"But how to explain the evils and the trials which afflict man?" Asks Mgr Ntedika. And he himself answers this as follows: "Between God and us there exist the 'spirits,' good and bad, but all created by God and inferior to him. The life of man has been confided to them: they influence it directly. The good spirits submit to God and help him to protect man against evil and misfortune. The bad spirits, on the contrary attack man and sometimes disturb God's benevolent design. But this disturbance itself is foreseen in the divine plan."[137] In addition to the bad spirits one can mention the vengeful Ancestors, the sorcerers, those with hate in their hearts.[138]

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134 Cf V. MULAGO. *Eléments fondamenteaux de la religion africaine*, in CRA 11 (1977) no 21-22, p. 61. Professor Mgr NTEDIKA asks if this medicinal character of the test might not be of Christian inspiration (See *La rencontre de Dieu*, in *Interpellations et croissance de la foi*, p. 38.

135 CfV. MULAGO, *Le Dieu des Bantu*, p. 35; V. MULAGO, *Elements*. p. 61; B. GUISIMANA, *L'homme selon la philosophie pende*, in CRA 2 (1968) no 3, p.72; TSHIMALENGA Ntumba, *La vision ...*, p. 183; TSHIMALENGA Ntumba, *La philosophie de la faute*, p. 178.

136 TAABU SABITI, *Proverbes et dictons en Swahili et en Kingwana*, s.l., s.d., p. 105, no. 6.

137 NTEDIKA Konde (Mgr), o.c., p. 38. See also V. MULAGO, *Le Dieu des bantu*, p. 15; G. GUARIGLIA, *L'Etre-Suprême*, in CRA 4 (1970), no. 8, p. 238.

138 Cf J. VANSINA, *Religions et sociétés en Afrique centrale*, in CRA 2 (1968) no. 2, p. 102, 104; PAZZI, *Culte de mort chez le peuple Nina*, in CRA 2 (1968) no. 4. p. 251.

We come back to the point of departure. It comes to this finally, that it is especially the intermediaries between man and God who are the source of all misfortunes. For, in the end, the African thinks that no person and nothing can do him harm if it is not permitted by God, even implicitly through his silence. The ground is slippery and delicate. One cannot examine this question deeply and answer it definitively in a work like this. The debate remains open.

It is sufficient for us, however, to emphasize that in all his sufferings and misfortunes, the African, after having interested the Ancestors and their allies in his cause, turns and shouts his suffering towards God, his last recourse. The African is convinced that God can intervene and fend off the misfortunes for he is the master of all the cosmic powers.[139]

The "Silence" of God

A fact which troubles and disturbs the African is the 'silence' of God in the presence of all the evils which assail him. He feels abandoned and for the moment he doubts God's benevolence. This is the experience of the Bamileké as reported by F. Emboussi Boulaga: "The Bamileké are aware of the Supreme Being who is certainly the creator of all. But the profound silence of God and his apparent inaction in the face of the evil which is active in creation makes one question this God."[140]

One would expect that, faced with this bewildering silence of God, man would be in dark despair, discouragement and perhaps blaspheme. How to understand and explain this silence of God who is known as almighty, omnipresent, omniscient, provident? No, the silence of God provokes man and tests him. "God may well be 'Father,' 'Sun,' and 'Prodigal' or 'Ally' of life, but his 'silence' in the time of tragedy risks all that being forgotten."[141]

But no, the African does not forget at all. He has found a provisional but tranquilizing answer. Everything that happens to him is in the plan of God, for he is the lord of history. "An astonishing and

139 Cf E.MVENG, *Les survivances traditionnelles*, in CRA 7 (1973) [no]. 13, p. 68; L.V. THOMAS, *La religion Africaine*, in CRA 11 (1977) no. 21-22, p. 72-75; J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 67-78: "God is the greatest Doctor."

140 F. EBOUSSI BOULAGA, *Dieu en Afrique*, p. 78; Cf O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, *Discours théologique*, p. 571

141 O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, *Discours théologique*, p. 581.

admirable thing, the 'muntu' does not succumb in this situation. He remains resistant to discouragement and despair, despite the trials.[142]

And yet the report of the non-intervention of God is clear. How then to explain it? We think, for our part , that God has created secondary causes which govern the daily progress of the universe. Nature has its laws put in her by the Creator. This does not contradict or prevent natural events. These things do not submit to any person, and the action of God could not disturb the cosmic powers and man. A very simple example: when all the atmospheric conditions are present to produce a lightning flash, it must occur. F. Eboussi Boulaga said the same thing in other words.[143]

All this does not exclude the happy outcome of a threatening events being assigned to God, because for the African there is no other explanation. And that is where we come back to our point of departure.

The "Discreet" Intervention of God

When they come face to face with the mysterious silence of a God who is aware of the torments of man, some Africans do not hesitate to turn to other remedial procedures, where they believe they can find protection.[144]

It is not impossible to come across an African completely bewildered, who no longer knows where to turn. He goes from one diviner to another, from one fetishist to another; he offers sacrifices to implore the help of the Ancestors and to appease those of them who might be angry.

At the end of all these attempts, man finally comes to the conclusion that only the Lord of life can come to his aid. So he confides himself to God, as the ultimate recourse. Consequently, whatever the outcome of the test, he accepts it as being God's response to his request.

For example if one asked for the healing of a parent and despite recourse to God the sick person dies, one will say spontaneously in Swahili *"Mwenyezi Mungu hakutaka ... Siku zake zilikuwa zimeenea ... Si kitu, vyumbe vyote ni vyake."* In free translation: God did not will it (it being understood "that the sick person should regain health").

142 O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, *Discours théologique*, p. 592. The author explains as follows the cries of the distressed man: " strong as they appear, these vigorous protestations remain those of believers passing through the tunnel of trial and, in their darkness, searching for the hand of the Improbable, of the 'ally' of a threatened life" (p. 576).

143 Cf. F. EBOUSSI BOULAGA, *Dieu en Afrique*, p. 19.

144 Cf O. BIMWENYI, Discours théologique, p. 581.

His days (of sickness) were already accomplished ... it is nothing, for all creatures belong to him (meaning that no one can prevent him taking what belongs to him because he has only loaned it to us).

This vision of the intervention of God, is completely in line with a theology of the "Life received from God" of which the African is very much aware. After these tests he is more conscious than ever that the God of his Ancestors never abandons him.

Professor Bimwenyi continues along the same line of reasoning saying: "Mawej remains the strongest, he is good, he desires the good, he is the "Ally" of life. This fundamental intention of man will end by being right, about death and about his allies. So, far from constituting a disaster in themselves, the tears and other tests become an 'initiatory tunnel' that is a life entirely under the sun, before the advent of the 'durable' life.[145]

Through all the anguishes and the sufferings of man the hand of God is there. His help has never failed man. But then how to explain that this person, in extreme helplessness, does not discern or does not feel the sustaining presence of God? Some think, and ourselves with them, that "The discretion of his interventions sometimes makes them hardly discernible."[146]

Briefly, we can affirm that God always intervenes to rescue man from being overcome by the powers of evil even if man is not always aware of this intervention.

Before the silence of God he could be tempted to turn towards other "places of help" but in the end he returns, all humble and confident, to the God of our Ancestors. He accepts what comes to him as the expression of the sovereign will of God, even death.

We are well enough equipped now to put the classic question of knowing if the African understands, in his religious practices, a way of thanking, of praising and of glorifying God, for all that he is and all that he has received from the Lord of life.

145 O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, *Discours théologique*, p. 592. When one escapes from mortal danger, or recovers health after a sickness that could be termed "ad patres", one cries out with astonishment, surprise and admiration: "Mungu iko", God is; God does exist: an additional proof that God exists (Swahili).

146 O. BIMWENYI, *Discours théologique*, p. 581. Rev NTEDIKA o.c., p. 42, arrives at the same conclusion: "Here, the presence and the action of God remains invisible, even though the signs of ancestral intervention seem more obvious in their in-breaking."
Professor Bimwenyi says that it is because "certain persons are so distant that they have no doubts, and do not understand the meaning of what happens to them and do not draw any benefit, as the following proverb shows: "Mulopo mukinyikila mupafu. Wewe ne: awu ngwa cibanda bakaji" (Luba): "God has prepared a 'mupafu' (a fruit tree) for you, and you say: It is good only for the women to climb!" (p. 568).

Does the African Practise a Cult towards God?

It would really be very ungrateful on the part of the African not to demonstrate, in one way or another, his joy and his acknowledgement of all the good which never ceases to come to him from the God of his Ancestors.

The word cult here means simply, that is schematically: 1- man receives everything from God; 2- he expresses to him his needs and his concerns; 3- God answers him in multiple ways. 4- Man shows him his utter dependence on his goodness by means of a prayer of thanksgiving, of praise, of worship, or else by material sacrifices. Here it is no longer man who waits for an intervention from God but it is God who waits for man to recognize his smallness and to turn towards him.

We are conscious that this scheme is imperfect and therefore perfectible. But the idea behind it is that the relationships which exist between the God of our Ancestors and man is not one-way. Once again we find intermediaries to play the same role as previously but this time in the opposite direction.

The thesis of the African forgetting God has therefore to be reviewed. For, despite the apparent absence of an official cultural setting, the African addresses himself to the God of his Ancestors by prayer and sacrifices as these are presented on the phenomenological plane to the Ancestors. Let us examine this subject more closely.

"A Forgetfulness of God That Is Offensive?"

Professor D. Adoukonou, from whom we borrow the title of this section, helps us to begin our reflection. "One could say that the Black person leaves God in "offensive forgetfulness." To support this thesis, there are massive social facts that we cannot deny (absence of temples, priest, rituals in the sense one usually uses the term). But there are other social facts no less significant which are difficult to accept if we adopt this thesis of forgetting God: the affirmation of the name of God in the names given to children, names which are prayers of confidence, of request, of thanksgiving; prayers ejaculated at every moment; explicit affirmation that God possesses all and that he has no need of anything, of any offering of blood for his strength as do the Vodun."[147]

[147] B. ADOUKONOU o.c., p. 228; One can also consult L.V. THOMAS, *La terre africaine*, p. 142; *Afrique et Parole* (1972-1973) no. 39-44, devoted solely to "*Noms théophores*."

After this long quotation, deliberately chosen for its appropriateness, we are tempted to conclude our considerations on the existence of a cult of God in the life of the African. But let us deepen it a little more.

In actual fact, the absence of an organized, official and explicit cult paid to God could cause an observer, who is not keenly aware or who is too hasty, to conclude purely and simply that there exists no cult of God whatsoever in Africa.

But then one must still go back to the question: why exactly there is no direct and visible cult rendered to God, when he is the great "benefactor" of man? On this question, there are several opinions. We lean towards joining those who maintain that it is because the African imagines and believes that God, being "All" and possessing all, according to human language, has no need of anything; our sacrifices, our gifts, our thanksgiving would be of no use to him.

Father L. Viaene has shared with us some of the results of his researches on this topic among the "Bahunde": "He (God, "Lulema") is good and does no harm to men. He possesses all and has no need of anything. Since he has created everything, he does not busy himself with creatures, and he has entrusted the direction of overything to the Spirits, "Bazimu." The "Muhunde" never think of invoking God, nor of honoring him by offerings and sacrifices to obtain help and protection. It would serve no purpose, since 'lugira' scarcely concerns himself with men, and can do without their gifts. Since he is good and does not hurt people, one must not fear him. Since he leaves people in peace, it is better to leave him in peace also."[148] We can find several other similar testimonies in the traditions of other African peoples.[149]

The cult of the spirits is a daily practice among Africans. One finds it from north to south. We have no intention of beginning a debate on the problem of an explicit cult of God. That is not our objective. We simply want to show that God is not forgotten in Africa.

148 L. VIAENE, o.c., p. 388. Concerning the absence of a cult of God, F. Eboussi Boulaga says: "... It is precisely because God is present and active unceasingly, that there is no need to ask him to interfere, it is superfluous for one whose single characteristic is to be constantly giving, without having to know about it. It may be that in the end that absence of cult is the specific form of the cult of God ... Absence of cult becomes a specific form of cult. In other words, there is no such thing as forgetting about God."

149 Cf A. SANON, *Enquête sur les noms théophores, dans Afrique et parole* (1972) no 39-40, pp 12-17,; V. MULAGO, *La religion traditionnelle*, p. 103; E. MUJYNYA, *Le mal et le fondement*, p. 6; V. MULAGO, *Le Dieu des Bantu*, p. 32; G. GUARIGLIA, *L'Etre Suprême*, p. 241; BUAKASA Tkm, o.c., p 31.

Notwithstanding what has been said above, there are some African peoples who openly render a cult to God. This is the case, among others, of the Nande of Congo.[150] Even among the people who seem not to have this official cult of God, but only to the spirits, it is always to God himself that they are offering it through these latter. Very often God and the Ancestors are venerated together.[151] We are convinced that however the African worships, it is to give thanks to God, to ask his help, following the very plan that he believes God himself wants. The latter comes to him via intermediaries. The African wants to follow the same way in going to God.

"A normal muntu gives back to God what comes from God."[152] All that he is and all that he has, he owes to him. So man can give him only, thanksgiving, prayer of praise and adoration.[153]

We add a brief final word on reverence for the Ancestors since we note that many times if not always, it is through them that one addresses God. Even if at one time or another one could resort directly to

150 Cf WASWANDI Kakule, o.c., p. 267; L. NGONGO, *Signification et portée des rites "libérateurs"*, dans CRA 2 (1968) no. 4, p. 285; L STEPPERS, *Dieu chez les Bamilebwe*, in CRA 2 (1968) no. 3, p. 172; H. GRAVAND, *Les religions africaines*, dans CRA 4 (1970) no. 7, p. 169; V. MULAGO, *La religion traditionnelle*, p. 121-122; J.S. MBITI, o.c., p. 194-209. Professor WASWANDI Kakule describes the sacrificial cult of God Nyamuhanga among the Nande of Congo. It has the following structure:

a) Those officiating at the sacrificial cult of God Nyamuhanga are
   1. The Sacrificer of the Kingdom: ISEMWASI
   2. The blacksmith: MUHESI

b) The typology of the sacred places and offerings
   1. The sacred places set aside for the offering of sacrifices
   2. The offering of the sacrifice

c) The three cultural stages of sacrifice to Nyamuhanga
   1. The first two days: pilgrimage to the hill of creation
   2. Third day: construction of the sacrificial hut
   3. Fourth day: Obuhere bukulu, the sacrifice to the Creator God.

For further details, read WASWANDI Kakule, *Culte sacrificiel à Dieu Nyamuhanga chez les Nande du Zaïre et signification du sacrifice*, in *Inculturation et libération en Afrique aujourd'hui*, Kinshasa, 1990, p. 65-101.

151 Cf J. MAWINZA, *Reverence for Ancestors*, in CRA 2 (1968) no. 4, p. 248; H GRAVRAND, o.c., p. 169; V. MULAGO, *Le Dieu des bantu*, p. 42.

152 O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, *Discours théologique*, p. 607.

153 Professor Bimwenyi gives us some examples of black African prayers
1 O Sambi, you have created all things, you created father, you created mother,
Father and mother have brought me forth, Nothing is beyond you!
2 Ancient Spirit, Lord of the spiders, Lord of rivers and forests,
Deign to accept this chicken, and give us game, male or female,
May the animal see the darkness no more. (*Discours théologique*, p.468-70)

God in some situations,[154] this recourse is rare, occasional, sporadic and individual.[155]

Reverence of the Ancestors

Without going very deep, because this is not the main purpose of our project, we want to bring together some key ideas of what is currently called reverence for the Ancestors. We are constrained after having mentioned the role of the Ancestors in what is known as "gestures and words" of worship, recognition, and praise addressed to God. Indeed "even if the Ancestors were concerned, it is finally to God that the ultimate recognition goes."[156] That is why some researchers "have qualified the black African cult as a divino-ancestral cult."[157]

Without describing how this reverence of the Ancestors is carried out, we can very well grasp the goal which is either to ask the protection of the Ancestors, or else to express respect and filial love for them, or again to thank them for some kindness received through their intercession. We have emphasized this above. But then why not address oneself directly to God? We have already given the reasons when we spoke of the transcendent God.

There is a concern about this reverence. Is there not a risk of preventing the African from advancing without pitfalls toward the God of our Ancestors? After all that we have just learned through searching in African sources this concern is without foundation. "The cult of the Ancestors is not an obstacle in itself in the journey of the African person towards a meeting with God. But, this cult also becomes an obstacle by turning man in on himself. Some researchers, however, state that, according to Africans, God himself agrees to supplications and sacrifices being offered to the Ancestors. Life returns to us from God through them. Consequently they remain our arbitrators and our intercessors."[158]

154 CfV. MULAGO, *Le Dieu des bantu*, pp 54-55; L STEPPERS, o.c., p171-172; L. NGONGO, o.c., p283.

155 Cf V. MULAGO, *Le Dieu des bantu*, pp 28, 36, 41; A. NGINDU, *Propos et problèmes concernant le culte des morts*, in CRA 3 (1969) no. 5, p. 94.

156 O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, *Discours théologique*, p. 476.

157 NTEDIKA Konde (Mgr), o.c., p. 40. See also A. B. B. ONDAIN, *Catégories structurelles des réligions Africaines*, in CRA 16 (1982) no. 31-32, p. 41-46.

158 NTEDIKA Konde (Mgr), o.c., p. 37. One can also refer to CEZ, o.c., no. 65 and 68; "But, the cult of the righteous Ancestors ought to be seen especially as a means of access to the divine though the descendants. In this sense, for the African Christian, the righteous Ancestors have a special place to the extent that they are present to the life of persons living

A supreme testimony of the faith of our Ancestors, are "these unknown Saints," of whom Professor Bujo speaks.[159] To avoid the risk of repeating ourselves, we stop there for the moment. The elements which we have at our disposal are sufficient for us to continue our itinerary.

But before this, we attempt to conclude our reflection on the question of the existence of an African cult of God. Mgr Ntedika helps us to summarize the state of the researches in this matter. "According to the researchers and the tribes, there is found either the absence of a cult addressed directly and explicitly to God, or the presence of such a cult but much reduced, or a cult directed at the same time to God and to the Ancestors, or, finally, a cult addressed directly and explicitly to God alone."[160]

We add a middle way, summarizing these researches, every sacrifice, every prayer, every act of worship, of praise, of supplication, of request is always addressed to God, without any need of recourse, through the Ancestors. Cult is rarely directly to God.

on this earth, and thus associated to all the important events of their pilgrimage here below ... Thus, to invoke the righteous ancestors; is to recover oneself; it is to gather everything that makes up his being, his existence; it is to establish a vital link with the source of life, God"; G. GUARIGLIA, o.c., p. 240; B MUZUNGU, *Le Dieu de nos pères,* Vol.3, p. 60; Th. TSHIRANGU, *Problématique d'une pensée*, p. 14; G. HULSTAERT, *Sur les génies des Mongo*, in CRA 3 (1969) no. 5, p. 51.

159 Cf. B. BUJO, *Nos ancêtres ces saints inconnus*, in BTA (1979) no. 1, p. 165-178

160 NKEDIKA Konde (Mgr),o.c.,p. 35.

Conclusion

We come finally to the end of this first survey of the religious heritage bequeathed to us by the Ancestors who have maintained a unique faith (monotheistic), lively and creative, in a God who is transcendent, immanent and yet invisible. This long overview has shown us that the difficulties of a world hostile to man has not disturbed his conviction that the universe was created by a transcendent Being, inaccessible but at same time very close to his creatures. It is this paradox which brought us finally to suggest the idea of a Transcendantally Immanent God. Not only has the immanence absorbed the transcendance, but the God of our Ancestors is "incomprehensible" except by means of this mental detour.

The African is not excessively worried about grasping the inaccessible. His religious intuition introduces him to a cosmic movement where he recognizes the Maker through the creature. He has tried to name the "Unnamable," the one who cannot be named because he is the primordial Ancestor, source of all life.

After having examined briefly who God is for the African, or rather what the African thinks is the "identity of God," we occupied ourselves with the expectations which this man lives, convinced that God can fill him with all the possessions of the earth. It is here that we have found what makes the very essence of traditional African religion, to know that our world has been created by "Mungu, Nzambi, Nzakomba, Nzambe, Imana, Mvidi Mukulu, Nzambi a Mpungu, Nyamé, Mulungu, Lulema, Amma, Mawu, Olorun, Nymuzinda, Nyamuhanga, Onyashongo."

The African person expects everything from God. Everything that happens to him comes from God. But as God does not live in the world and is inaccessible, the African resorts to the dead, those who have lived in harmony with society, that he calls Ancestors. These play an ambiguous role: they can be a source of both good and evil for man. However all this has been foreseen by God in his plan for the world.

God is the origin and the end of all. Man can receive nothing from the Ancestors if it does not come from God. And in order to be sure that his sacrifices and his prayers reach God he seeks the help of the same Ancestors. This last preoccupation constitutes in reality the fundamental element of the traditional African religion: the relationship

between man and God includes the relationship between man and the community of the living dead and the living terrestrials, without forgetting the relationship between man and the infra-human creatures.

Can one propose going beyond all these researches which seem to centre on the values of our traditional African religion? Eboussi Boulaga could help us to take this decisive step: "We can say that beginning from the problems of the cult of the Ancestors, the dead, we remain practically confined to that, because for us religious acts are manifested first of all in the cult of the ancestors. In any case, even these researches are not destined to remain filed away. We want to use them in practical ways, in evangelization. We consider our traditional religion as our Old Testament, and we know that the Old Testament always exists together with the New Testament. More to the point, they are not concurrent, however one reads the two. So, we want to be allowed to read our Old Testament, our religious concepts. There will be clarification in the course of time; and ideas will be corrected by the gospel itself."[161]

This reflection-request of F. Eboussi is provocative and questioning. All the human and material resources invested in the survey of our religious traditions would be lost if they are not "digested and assimilated" by African Christian theology. So it seems to us that this is to be born of a marriage between African traditional theology and the incarnation of the Gospel in African soil.

This is what we are going to attempt to do in the second chapter: understanding the Incarnation of the Word of God as being the coming into the (African) world of the God whom our Ancestors have adored as transcendent and immanent, distant yet near to the African person.

[161] EBOUSSI BOULAGA, *Dieu en Afrique*, p. 79.

CHAPTER TWO

THE INCARNATION AS THE CLOSENESS OF THE GOD OF OUR ANCESTORS

The God of our Ancestors has come to us. This affirmation could have appeared earlier, at the beginning of the journey which, we have undertaken. Our concern in this work and particularly in this chapter is not to treat the hermeneutic of the Incarnation as an historical event nor as a divine mystery. This has already been made the object of a survey that was done some years ago.[1] We want to take a further step in the direction of what was said in Chapter One, to know that the Son of the God of our Ancestors "was made flesh and lived among us" (*Jn* 1:14).

The Incarnation of the Word is not a mystery coming from outside, foreign to the traditional African religion in its conception of God. It is located within the African's prolonged search for God. Our Ancestors, after having searched and groped for him, saw him irrupting into their history.[2]

"Our Ancestors taught us to know God, certainly, but a faraway God that no one had ever seen and whom only the multiplicity of intermediaries made accessible, with difficulty, although he is also present in daily life. So he is a God who is near to our faith but far, one who never took on the human condition."[3] But there! Paradoxical as it might appear, this transcendent and immanent God has "agreed" to "meet the African man" and to journey with him on the same road

1 Cf MASUMBUKO Mununguri, *L'Incarnation, Fondement de l'Inculturation du Message Evangélique, Lecture de Jn 1:14*; Graduate paper in TSH, under the direction of Professor Buetebela Balembo, FTCK, 1987.

2 Cf MASUMBUKO, o.c., p. 11-13.

3 LUYEYE Luboloko, *Le Christ Initiateur, Esquisse d'une christologie inculturée*, t.2, Doctoral thesis (unpublished), Institut Catholique de Toulouse, 1988, p. 177

which leads to God Himself. Through and in the Word of the God of our Ancestors, it is God Himself in person, who was made one of us and came to live among us.

"This news is extraordinary: it defies all human wisdom. The God in whom the Christians believe, is not only the Transcendent, "the one for whom the smoke of the kitchen is invisible (according to our Ancestors), but he is especially the,one who, by his Son has come to visit men who were sinners and walked in the night."[4] It is to this news, at the same time joyous and "incredible", that the apostles testified (*Jn* 1:3).

The coming of the God of our Ancestors into our Africa world is the achievement of the multi-secular experience from which our Ancestors had fashioned a God whom they grasped as transcendent yet immanent, near and far at the same time. "If our Ancestors had such a good idea of God, it is to be noted that such knowledge requires a revelation by God himself. The Christian novelty is to know that this God so great is very near to us, one who speaks with us. Our Ancestors spoke of Him, spoke to Him, but never with Him. In praying, the Christian speaks with God in a friendly dialogue. God is not only our Maker, he is also our Father; we are His adoptive sons."[5]

What does it mean to the African that the God of his Ancestors has come to him? Indeed this event, so unexpected and even troubling, would not make any sense to him if he didn't link it to his daily preoccupations. The African lives and breathes only for the sake of life itself. If the proximity of the God of our Ancestors through the incarnation of His Word could reinforce and prolong this life, then it is Good News for the African. So now we can already say that "only Christ can suggest and impose himself as the true paradigm of all existence."[6]

The Incarnation seen as the proximity of the God of our Ancestors is thus the "locus" where are fulfilled all the longings dearest to the soul of the African. For it is by this redeeming incarnation that he can henceforth have access to his ultimate end.[7]

Christ said: "I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance" (*Jn* 10:10). Thus, he came so that all the men of all gen-

4 LUYEYE Luboloko, o.c., p. 177.
5 B.MUZUNGU, *Religions traditionnelles africaines,* p.87.
6 KISIMBA Nyembo, o.c., p. 164.
7 Cf B. MUZUNGU, *Le Dieu de nos pères,* vol. 2, p. 85; MUPITA Maliki, o.c., p. 103, adds, "Christ, manifesting himself in the world, is the unique response and the ultimate goal of the saerch for total human fulfilment, and also the principle of cosmo-theandric harmony."

erations and of all cultures might see in him the unique man, the origin of the life of man as Creator-Giver-of-life; unique in having given his life as the Primordial Gift, so that man, so deplorably lost in sin, is again provided with meaning and hope; unique also in being able to dispose fully of the life of men.[8]

The relevance of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of the God of our Ancestors emanates for the African precisely from the immeasurable capacity that Christ possesses for launching the African into a new kind of existence and relationships. This is true because Christ was born, died, and rose again "recreated man and his world in the image of God, and therefore in conformity with the initial project of the Creator. He also assumes for the African the figure of an Ancestor, at once genitor and founder, initiator of a new form of interpersonal and cosmo-theandric relationships."[9]

We will examine this last aspect in our second theme. But before this we will have reflected on the way in which the African names the Incarnate Word, as our fathers previously named the God of our Ancestors. This process has but one goal: to try to understand the Incarnation as the coming into our world of the God who from time immemorial our fathers recognized and served according to their conscience, helped by natural revelation. This is somewhat like the Athenians who venerated a God whom they didn't really know and whom Paul came to proclaim (Cf. *Acts* 17:23).

I.
The Mystery of the Incarnation in Christian African Expressions

For a long time we have spoken of 'African theology.' Maybe we neglect to search there where the Spirit brings this theology to birth that is, at the heart of the communities that he gives life to?"[10] It is in the heart of these communities arising from the proclamation of the

8 LUYEYE Luboloko, o.c., p. 218.
9 Cf NYEME Tese, o.c., p. 102-103.
10 R. LUNEAU, *Le vent souffle où il veut et tu entends sa voix (Jn 3),* in J. M. ELA, *Voici le temps des héritiers*, Paris, 1981, p.65.

Good News of Christ that the African tries to penetrate "initially" into the mystery of the "God who became man." A mystery with the dimensions of an abyss, a God so inaccessible, unspeakable, invisible. The proclamation of such "catastrophic news" frightened the African and, as one might say, completely bewildered him. He allowed himself to be instructed by messengers apparently better informed than he. Without much understanding (was he able to?), he welcomed the heavenly Message. It was repeated at length for days, months, years, finally transmitting it to his progeny, in theologico-anthropological categories that he grasped only through a sustained intellectual effort by "the school of the whites."

A few generations, not many it is true, have passed since then. The African, heir of all these Ancestral and "western-Christian" traditions, today takes up the task of trying to understand this "Event" of which his fathers and he himself claim to be the recipients. In this new process of faith and understanding, the Spirit breathes into his ear that this "heavenly guest" wants to make a covenant with him. This Covenant is translated by symbolic names with an African flavour and full of meaning. A way of signifying that the "Newly-Come-Always-There" is henceforth "One-of-us-always-different-from-us."

"It is necessary for Jesus to be named by the ones who have welcomed him. This Jesus will be healer, grand master of initiation, Ancestor par excellence, or chief of chiefs not because I will have proclaimed it to you, but because he carried out healings and initiations and gave birth to a free man."[11] These names drawn from African anthropology and sociology will always be limited in their ability to express the global reality of the person of Jesus, the incarnate Word. But attached to an aspect of the salvific activity of Christ, they translate the experience that the African has had of Him and what he expects of Him. For as we have said in the first chapter, God is the "Unnamable."[12] However these socio-anthropological expressions will

[11] Cécé KOLIE, Jésus guérisseur, in Fr KABABELE ea, o.c., p. 198. Professor Bujo has much to say along the same lines, "It is only legitimate to give to Jesus Christ today titles more deeply rooted in the culture of the peoples to whom the gospel message is being addressed ..." in *African Theology in its Social Context,* Nairobi, 1992, p.84.

[12] Cf L.V.THOMAS, o.c., p.133: "God is not named, he is above the "nomination" of man when he consents to speak his name, the initiative comes from him (*Ex* 3:13-16). To give a name is at the same time to create a relationship. To be named is to accept to be dependent on the one who gives the name. God refuses any kind of dependence and he alone is the creator. He is beyond any attempt to name him by men who want to be able to grasp and to accept a name, because it is he who invites man to enter into a covenant with him, a covenant which he himself proposes and of which he is the final guarantor.

help us to better understand and to live the new form of relationship between the African and God, since He has resolved to reveal Himself definitively in His incarnate Son.

The God of our Ancestor revealing himself in his incarnate Word wanted man to participate in his own divinity by introducing him to a vast movement of divine-human African solidarity.

"The Incarnation is an involvement in the divine interiority, offered freely by God to human nature."[13] This mystery is capital and fundamental. It achieves in an unexpected manner the purpose for which man was created: entering into the divine depths in order to rise up with the whole of transfigured creation (*Eph* 1:3-14). The coming of Christ as man and passing from life to death, is not an unusual event, nor incompatible with his being God. It belongs to the very being of the God-Son, in whose image all was created, being at all times the image of his creation. Included in this view, the Incarnation is before all else a consequence or a proof of this ontological solidarity which binds the divine and the human in a communion of life. In other words, God is not in solidarity with men in order to be made man, for it always belonged to his very being to be in solidarity with man.[14] But by the Incarnation the God of our Ancestors took it upon himself to reveal this to man for the latter did not seem able to discern it despite the multiplicity of messengers (*Heb* 1:1-2) sent to him.

The multiplicity of titles, names and propositions applicable to Christ obliges us to choose. We will take among so many others the categories of Ancestor, of Elder, and of Initiator.[15] Let us not forget that our goal is to arrive at a means of expressing more or less clearly the mystery of the Incarnation to an African with all that it presupposes as religious understanding. We will see progressively that we will return on the major theme of African thought which is *life*.

The God of Our Ancestors Reveals to Us His Incarnate Son

It pleased God to reveal his Son to us so that we could announce his coming to the nations (Cf. *Gal* 1:16). The will of God has been

13 R. SASTRE, Liturgie romaine et négritude, in *Des Prêtres noirs s'interrogent*, Paris, 1957, p. 165.

14 Cf. R. J. PENOUKOU, o.c., p. 94.

15 For the titles and propositions applicable to Jesus, one can consult LUYEYE Lubaloko, o.c., p. 275-276.

manifested in the breaking of a long silence which surrounded his mystery. His own pedagogy had already prepared man to support the bursting forth in splendour of his definitive revelation. In sending his only Son, "Kyusha" in Kihunde, God revealed to us another aspect of his mystery already ineffable. Human intelligence could not probe the depths of this great mystery without the consent of God.

"The true God speaks."[16] His word is always a revelation, a communication. Until then this remained, one would say, partial. But in his "Final word" he delivered to us his own Son. One would expect from this that man understanding "a little more" of God would fall into wonder or discouragement for he would grasp even more extent of the gulf which separates him from God. But, "curiously, far from separating us from God, this revelation brings him closer: if God carries in himself the mystery of an exchange, of a communion through the difference, then perhaps it will be possible for us to approach him without any fear of being consumed by him, as by the fire of a violently blazing furnace."[17]

So the Event by which God reveals his Son to us is the Incarnation. This is so much more than a "biological process," the liberation of a woman who awaits, in anguish, the day when she will finally see the fruit of her womb. It is located within a general divine plan of revelation to the world. And in Jesus, God tells us: "This is my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased" (*Mt* 3:17; *Mk* 1:11, *Lk* 3:22).[18] The Father confirms the words of the angel at the Annunciation by these words: ."He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; therefore the child to be born of you will be holy; he will be called Son of God. (*Lk* 1:32-35). The supreme revelation of the Son by the Father. God himself tells us who is "this man Jesus."

In speaking of the above, we note that for the "Ewe-Mina" the incarnation of God-Son would mean very much more than an action within history, and more than the taking of physical flesh. It would be inscribed deeply within the dynamic of the community of life which joined Christ to mankind and to the cosmic creation for ever. In order

16 F. EBOUSSI BOULAGA, Christianisme sans fétiche, p. 36.

17 P. FERLAY, Abrégé de la foi catholique, Paris, 1986, p. 104.

18 Cf. T.O.B., Complete Edition, *Mk* 1:11, note "It is not a matter of an arbitrary whim, but of an election in view of a mission with which God invested Jesus and declared him to be his Son, the well-beloved; then *Lk* 3:28, note adds that this verse reproduces *Psalm* 2:7 and signals the messianic enthronement of Jesus and the beginning of his mission to God's People. The fact that this word was spoken by the Father makes it the revelation par excellence of the mystery of Jesus.

to give man and the cosmos birth and being, the Christ in whom and by whom all was created, has always been in partnership, in solidarity with creation. Thus the fact of the incarnation appears as the supreme expression of the cosmo-theandric relationship."[19]

The supreme expression by which God, in revealing his Son in us, reveals himself to us "immediately." One could be tempted to forget that the Incarnation is above all a divine Event through which God wants to communicate with man in a way completely special, unusual and definitive. In order to understand this "Ultimate Newness" God's help was necessary to enlighten the human mind and prepare man's heart to welcome the "Divine Messenger. "Also, having seen the grandeur of the mystery of the incarnation, all the cultural attempts to explain or understand the true import of the incarnation of God-Son in the pathetic history of mankind seem woefully inadequate. Even the chosen people, who were prepared to welcome such an Event, preferred to call it blasphemy.[20]

A God who had a Son! And a Son whom he reveals to men in a "human existence," apparently nothing but human! This is unheard of in Africa. And it was the Word of God of our Ancestors who was made flesh (Cf *Jn* 1:14); one saw him in Galilee, in Judea, in Samaria; he spoke, he worked miracles. The African heard the story of this Event and recounted it in his turn.

In spite of everything the incarnation of the Son of God remains a mystery for the African. It is the demonstration of the love of the Father. But for the African, he cannot accept for himself that God could become man. For indeed the divine world is for him so distant from men that there is no possibility of any interpretation.[21] "We have simply there a data of faith that is the revelation and the realization of a divine project suggested to our religious conscience."[22]

This reflection of Professor Penoukou seems to us very level-headed and wise in the face of a mystery above all salvific but deeply impen-

19 E.J. PENOUKOU, o.c., p. 93. A little above on the same page the author says: "... one is convinced that the protector gods interfere in the lives of their subjects, to govern from within their history. This conviction relies strongly on the religious sense, even if at times it borders on superstition. In this perspective and in order to combine such religious intuition with the goal of conversion, the Jesus-Christ Event can appear as the direct intervention of God in the life of every community, to lead them towards the definitive good. Even more, Christ became man to allow man to participate in the fullness of the very life of God (2 *Peter* 1:4)."

20 Cf E.J. PENOUKOU, o.c., p. 91.

21 Cf KISIMBA Nyembo, o.c., p. 160.

22 E.J. PENOUKOU, o.c., p. 91.

etrable to human alone reason. For an African it is a real Revelation in the sense of an "unveiling of a mystery" long hidden, sheltered from the religious intuition of our Ancestors. He can only rejoice at it especially that the "Newly-come-always-there" comes to tell him who is the real God of his Ancestors.

The Incarnate Son, Revealer of the Father

"Mpfula n'eshe banalingana," say the Balunde. "The eldest Son and his father are equal." One understands very well what this implies in the African culture.

Did not Jesus say to Philip who wanted to see the Father: "Whoever sees me sees the Father, do you not believe ... that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me?" (*Jn* 14:9-10). It is thanks to this "divine communion" that the Incarnate Son came into the world as the messenger of the Father, charged with telling men, definitively, who God is.[23]

The Incarnation finds its significance in the ultimate mission of the Incarnate Word to tell the world about the God of our Ancestors. "In calling Christ the Word, John wants above all to point to the revealing function that he carried out from the beginning of creation for the sake of the world and of men. He expressed God to them."[24]

The Mystery long hidden was revealed to the African thanks to and by means of the incarnate Word in whom the God of our Ancestors is made visible. The incarnate word is the "tangible" and definitive expression of who God is. Henceforth the African can contemplate the glory of God (Cf *Jn* 1:14) and sing of his wonders.

God no longer says "I am who I will be" (*Ex* 3:14). His Word was made flesh and pitched his tent in the land of our Ancestors. A new dawn has risen on the savannahs and in the game-filled forests, a new Sun which knows no setting, calling mortals to play the game of God, to play 'Dyepu dya Mwena Kulu,' until he returns."[25]

But does this Incarnation of the Son of God truly and really inform the African about the identity of God? In reflecting on what we have said in the first chapter, we could say that the incarnate Word comes to tell the African the true identity of the one whom his Ancestors called

[23] Cf E. EBOUSSI BOULAGA, Christianisme sans fétiche, p. 168-169.
[24] D. MOLLAT, Etudes johanniques, Paris, 1979, p. 39.
[25] O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, Avènement ... , p. 136.

"Maker," "Father," "All Powerful." It is as if he said: "I come from the God of your Ancestors." The African welcomes him with some apprehension. In the course of his teaching the incarnate Word reveals progressively and gently that he is not only the Messenger of God but the Revelation of God: "the one who sees me, sees the Father." Thus is implied, that with him the African will no longer have to search for God where he is not, for he is henceforth in residence.

"In him (Jesus) there are accomplished and transcended all the means which used to enable people to search for and encounter the Most High. For in him God Himself has come to meet men, and to teach them to recognize Him in all persons, especially in the little ones."[26]

The Event of the Incarnation, as lived by the African who adheres to it, shines as a light in the midst of night. God made himself small and humble, to reassure man and bring him little by little to a filial confidence in him. The true face of God is "unveiled" but remains yet to be recognized by whoever looks for God with the firm determination of finding him. Previously one read his will and discovered it through events, happy and less happy, the natural calamities, his silence before the suffering of man. Since his Word has taken on the African way, the African henceforth has only a single grid-map to read in all that happens to him, his words, his deeds. It is Christ.

The incarnate Word is the perfect Revelation of the God of our Ancestors in the sense that, according to the sovereign plan of God, it is by his own Son that all the creation will be brought together for the glory of God (Cf *Eph* 1:6). His privileged relationship with God (Cf *Jn* 17) makes him the unique and perfect Revelation of God. He is not the "mouth of God" like other prophets, his predecessors. He is the "word of God." This word proceeds from the interior of God. It is God in person who gives himself to men. That is why moreover he is called "Emmanuel".[27] A question arises concerning all these meanders somewhat ordinary and well known. The African already "knew" God, at least his existence and his action in and on the world. But then who reveals the incarnate Word? We have just said, indirectly, that in the

[26] LUYEYE Lubokolo, o.c., p. 170. The same author adds on page 271, "In Jesus, God comes to surprise those who wait and those who journey to meet him. He has anticipated us in creating us, and he will anticipate us in saving us."

[27] LUYEYE Luboloko, o.c., p. 281. One can also refer to R. MICHIELS, *Jésus Christ, Hier, Aujourd'hui, Demain*, Tournai, Casterman, 1971, p. 138. The author writes that, as Jesus as the Sacrament of God, is the highest expression of God. He is the human visibility of the Invisible God. Professor Bujo adds that God is so far identified with man that he has become part of the material world (Cf B.T.A., 2 (1979), p. 171.

incarnation God lets himself be seen, touched, and reached by the African. Accordingly, God was for the African more than a Supreme Being, he was above all transcendent, sensed sometimes as immanent but always keeping his distance, "vis-à-vis" man.

The Logos made flesh revealed to the African that God is love (*Jn* 4: 8), and that all that he does is obviously out of his love for man. For "if he did not bring us the love with which God loved him from all eternity, what purpose would it serve for him to become man?"[28] This unveiling of the paternal love of God comes to reinforce the African's faith in a God who wishes only good for him and puts aside, at least in principle and provisionally, the idea that misfortune comes from God. We think that we have here a fundamental dogma of the African faith in God who is Love. Life is received as a gift of God and is maintained through the love of this same God.

"It is therefore through the man-God that we know finally that God is not only our creator, but that he wanted to make us his adopted sons. It is by the incarnation that his love is revealed to us in the clearest way."[29]

The Incarnation is therefore not only the ultimate revelation of God to the African but also an African experience of the love of God, a love which goes even to the extent of alienating others (*Ph* 2:6-11). A "fundamental Experience, lived in a new proximity to the Improbable. Our life in the presence of this new brightness becomes renewed in every way."[30]

This divine-human-African encounter is also a revelation of man to himself. He discovers his true identity, knowing himself to be created in the image and likeness of God (Cf. *Gn* 1). Consequently, his way of regarding things and persons must reflect the love which God has for him, for since the incarnation the human being has become "the grammar of a possible self-expression of God."[31] That is simply that the human person becomes the place where God is "encountered" and "met."

After all this, one could have the impression that our Ancestors were inaccessible, transcendent, distant. The mystery of the incarna-

28 J. GUILLET, *Jésus Christ dans l'Evangile de Jean*, in Cahiers Evangile 31 (1980), p. 28.
29 B. MUZUNGU, *Le Dieu de nos pères,* vol. 2, p. 85.
30 O. BIMWENYI KWESHI, *Discours théologique,* p. 386.
31 Cf BUJO, *African Theology*, p. 82, quoting K. RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, New York-London, 1978, p. 223, and more expicitly W. PANNENBERG, *Jesus God and Man*, Philadelphia, 1968, p. 195-211, "the grammar of God's possible self-expression."

tion does not mean the fusion of God and man. It is a "didactic eschatological process" of God in order to lead man to cease searching for him in the water, the forest, the fire, ... but above all in his likeness, the image of God. Through the incarnation God remains inaccessible, the wholly Other, the Incomprehensible. "That is to say that even in his revelation in Christ and through him, God retains his essence, he remains also the Hidden God. In Christ, God does not lower himself, in a way that one could possess him, use him. Jesus is not a substitute for God. He sends us back to God not as the projection of ourselves – we have to receive the Other – nor as the reflection of our needs, but to God as he is in himself, in his presence which silences every word, every intermediary and constitutes us in ourselves."[32]

To conclude we can say that the incarnate Word is the final expression of the God of our Ancestors who himself speaks to man. This confirms the intuition of our Ancestors in their confession of faith in one only God, the creator of all that is. The African knows henceforth that this God came to live in the land of his Ancestors and that he has identified with man, who remains created in his image. This was an event par excellence demonstrating the infinite love of God, but also his greatness and his glory.

The incarnate Word then has the right to say that he is the way, the truth and the life (Cf *Jn* 14:6). Christ, by its relationship to God and his own involvement in the unfolding of the world, comes to place himself between God and the African.

Christ the Organic Medium

The expression "Medium organique" is borrowed from E.J. PENOUKOU.[33] What meaning does it have here? In the first chapter we spoke of the whole chain of intermediaries (a network of mediums) who are interposed between God and man (African). God supervises the world by and through this web of intercessors who sometimes take the "sorrows" of man to present them to God and sometimes also transmit the will of God to man. This schema seemed, in

[32] F. EBOUSSI BOULAGA, *Christianisme sans fétiche*, p. 142. See also D. NOTHOMB, *L'homme et Dieu*, p. 96-97: for the latter "Immana (God)" is more "Immana" than ever since the Incarnation. He is unequalled and great.Cf E.J. PENOUKOU, o.c., p. 91-105.

[33] Cf E.J. PENOUKOU, o.c., p. 91-105 Cf O. BIMWENYI KWESHI o.c., p. 291-295.

the eyes of some observers, to constitute a screen which relegated God to the forgotten basement. This question has been provisionally solved. We can say that in reality the link between God and man survived in and beneath these multiple anthropo-cosmic mediations.

In time the Good News emerged and had an explosive effect. It upset the African and has become part of his journey. This novelty brought a discontinuity in habits and customs and even in the African conception of world and of God. The same novelty is inserted into the continuity of African values which are ordered according to the happiness and the good progress of the human community. It is this double effect of the Good News on "African cultures" that Professor Bimwenyi calls "the discontinuity in the continuity."[34]

One of the fundamental points which makes a discontinuity in the continuity will be the privileged position that is occupied by the "Newly-Come-Always-There" in the relationship between man and God. The Ancestors, the Elders, the Chiefs ... do not lose their position in these new relationships. But their place is henceforth subordinate to that of Christ and fulfilled in him. For "only the Christ is the true Mediator who filled to perfection the roles carried out by the spirits."[35]

But we must return to our expression. The mediation of Christ is not to be confused with that of the classic intermediaries in traditional African religion. Christ is the personal Envoy of the God of our Ancestors, as we said above. He participates in the divinity of the one who sent him (Cfr *Jn* 1:1). It is concerning this title that he can say: "Everything was given to me by my Father. No one knows the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wishes to reveal him" (*Mt* 1:27).[36]

Seen from this angle Christ cannot be discerned as a secondary divine being, but as having the same divine essence as the God of our Ancestors. And everything that he says emanates from the will of the Father. At the same time, consequently, he has something in common with man because in his quality of "organic Medium" that is of "vis-

[34] Cf O. BIMWENYI KWESHI o.c., p. 291-295.

[35] WASWANDI Kakule, *Nyamuhanga: La conception de Dieu*, p.268.

[36] A note in the T.O.B., Complete Edition, connects this passage with two others (*Mt* 21:37; 24,36), where Jesus experiences indirectly his unique relationship with the Father (cf *Mt* 11:27, note e).

ible Mediator" between God and man, he is the fulfilment of the human search for God.[37]

The African, as Paul did, gives thanks to God through Christ Jesus for this perfect and incomparable gift. He knows henceforth that all must be consecrated to God according to his own will through Christ (Cfr *Rom* 1:8). Christ the "organic Medium" cuts short the occult powers who in the past served as "media" to man in the interpretation of happy and less happy events. He is "God-among-us" and it is to this title that the fate of the African is henceforth bound through the "mediational" role of the Word of God made flesh.

"The status of organic Medium as applied to Christ means here that he was always the first "Being-there-with-others"; but still dependent on the Supreme Being, of the same divine essence, and in solidarity with all creatures who, created in him, can depend only on him."[38]

We see that for ourselves this role of "organic Medium" of Christ as being a "perfection" of all other forms of pre-Christian mediations. The traditional faith of the African was centered on the value of life, of solidarity, of respect for the Elders and all this was crowned by the fear of God, Creator of all that is, visible and invisible. We have described the transcendent character of God and the way in which our forebears in the faith in a sole god-creator got around this obstacle conceived as a "spiritual" building where God is the summit to which one has access by a series of intermediaries, notably the Ancestors and the Elders.

The Son of God made flesh is thus presented as the one who channels, directs, encourages and incarnates the process of rising towards the Father. He not only indicates the path toward Him, but he is himself the path. It is through him that Africa becomes open finally and definitively to God who is not simply with us, but much more, he becomes as we are, like men in all things but sin (*2 Cor* 5:21; *Heb* 1:15; *1 Pt* 2:22). For "in Christ the wall of transcendence is thrown down."[39]

Christ becomes *de facto* the obligatory passage to the Father. He has been sent as Reconciler and Founder of the new humanity con-

37 Cf E.J. PENOUKOU, o.c., p. 91.

38 E.J. PENOUKOU, o.c., p. 95. The same author adds on p. 98 that the "unfathomable mystery of the Christ-event in the history of man and the created universe appears definitively as a radical and necessary consequence of his interior ontological solidarity with God."

39 B. ADOUKONOU, o.c., T.1, p. XXIII.

formed to the saving plan of God for the world. It was through the Word that God created the world and it is through him that he saves it today. He is the Mediator in creation and redemption.[40]

We can say therefore that with Christ we have the certainty that the way which leads to the Father is no longer in isolated words or deeds carried out under the direction of any "medium", human or cosmic. Christ shares in our humanity without being consumed there. All the Ancestors and the Elders who have served and still serve as intercessors close to God can do that only in Christ for they are put in charge by him. We think that their role is made easy by the Unique Mediator appointed and accredited by God to be close to men. This dimension of the problem will be examined in our final reflection.

The mediation of Christ depends also on an understanding of God by the African. Indeed Christ is the organic Medium through whom our relationship with the triune God is formulated and confirmed and therefore also our understanding of what he is for us. In other words we cannot have any understanding of the triune God except that which comes from a faith relationship with Christ[41] (Cfr *Jn* 14:9-10; *Jn* 15:26).

In order to conclude our reflection on the role of the incarnate Word as "organic Medium" we can propose that Christ, for the African, is really the "Host par excellence." He is himself the Messenger, the Message and the Medium of communication. Better, he communicates himself to Africans, in himself, by himself and with himself. These, filled with wonder and following the footsteps of their Ancestors, welcome him and give him a name: "Muombezi" (in Swahili) or "Molobeli" (in Lingala), which means Intercessor and mediator. He is also called the Proto-Ancestor in consideration of his position in the new human community and more particularly in view of the relationships between God, the living dead and the living terrestrials.

It is this notion of Proto-Ancestor as applied to Christ that we will examine in the following theme.

40 Cf LUYEYE Luboloko, o.c., p. 283.

41 Cfr E. .J. PENOUKOU, o.c., p.96-97. The author explains: starting from the Incarnation the true understanding of the triune God by man is less concerned with rational categories than with a form of relationship proposed as an image of the intra-trinitarian relationship itself (p. 97). In this sense then, Christ seen as "Médium organique" between the God Father and (African) man, shows not only that he belongs integrally to the two mediatory processes in the Trinity, but also that these two processes have been in a communion of being from the beginning (Cf 2 *Tim* 1:9-10).

Christ as Proto-Ancestor, or Frist-Born in the Extended Family

Among the titles or Christological names which can help the African to understand the Incarnation of the Word of God, we want to exploit particularly those of "Proto-Ancestor" and "Elder." They are drawn from African anthropology and are able to provide light for the African on his journey toward the God of his Ancestors. Indeed how can he commune in the mystery of the humiliation of God (*Ph* 2: 6-8) in his world full of contradictions and inimical powers, the "biophobes"?

The notion of Ancestor being almost connatural to him, it follows that it is good to present "the one who comes" as the Ancestor of our Ancestors who comes to speak to us of his Father who is also our Father. It is the same for the reality of the "Elder" who is the heart of the African family in which the Elder has a special and very responsible position.

These two African realities will guide us in our attempt to penetrate, if only superficially, the impenetrable mystery of the God who became man. Our path will be, of course, by way of analogy.

Christ as Proto-Ancestor

The notion and reality of Ancestor are omnipresent in African cultures. They are a masterpiece in the construction of traditional African religion. The African Ancestors play a determinative role in the life of the tribe, the clan, and the (extended) family. They are presumed to receive life from God and to transmit it to the living terrestrials. These owe everything to them and in return they surround them with the greatest reverence because they have been and still are responsible for the whole community. Here we refer back to all that was said in the first chapter about the Ancestors. Now we wish to apply this "privilege", to Christ, incarnate Word of the Father.

We are always situated in the line of traditional African faith. God alone gives life. His Son Jesus came into the world to give life in its fulness and in a definitive way.[42]

And as he is, from the beginning, in union with God and himself God (Cf *Jn* 1:1-3; 17:5; *Rev* 19:3; *1 Jn* 1:1-2), we can, without risk of being contradicted by the biblical tradition, say that Christ is the "Proto Ancestor."

42 Cfr VATICAN II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 5.

Professor Bujo said the same thing when he noted that "the African concept of Jesus as Proto-Ancestor in no way contradicts the teaching of the New Testament. It is not of course that we are treating Jesus as an ancestor in any crudely biological sense. When we regard him as the ancestor par excellence, we mean that we find in him the one who begets in us a mystical supernatural life."[43]

Christ is the "Ancestor par Excellence" because he fulfils all the criteria required by African tradition to be counted among the Ancestors and he goes even beyond these criteria of selection. In the sense that the life that he gives, he gives in fullness and this life is himself (Cf *Jn* 4:1-42, the conversation with the Samaritan woman). He is not content to give life to men but he continues on the same journey with them and leads them through all life's hazards (Cf *Lk* 24:13-35).

"In becoming man, in becoming the means of direct contact with God, Christ has fulfilled the same function as the Ancestors and become the Ancestor par excellence."[44] The main reason which justifies the "ancestral primacy" of Jesus with regard to the other Ancestors is, it seems to us, the fact that he is the source of real life. Indeed it is by him and in him that everything was made and nothing that is exists without him (Cf *Jn* 1:3).

But how does Christ as Proto-Ancestor help us to understand that the God of our Ancestors has come among us? The African has a great "aspiration" for life. In welcoming Christ as the Messenger of God, he welcomes at the same time the God who sent him (Cf *Mk* 9:37). But for a long time, he had known that God's life came to him through his Ancestors. Then Jesus comes and says to him today that he and the Father are one (Cf *Jn* 17:22) from the beginning (*Jn* 1:1). In order to grasp this Good News, the African thinks of Christ and compares him to the Ancestors whom he knows better than Christ. For lack of an adequate language to express the "precedence" of Jesus over the other

43 B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social Context*, p. 94. It is the author who underlines. Concerning the prefix "Proto" we support the explanation given in V. MUPITA Baliki, o.c. , p. 100. He says that "Proto" referring to "Ancestor" emphasizes the antecedence of Christ with regard to the founding Ancestors of the clan as Christ said of himself in relationship to Abraham (Cf *Jn* 8:58). Christ is Ancestor *sui generis* for he is of the same divine essence as the God of our Ancestors. For the typology Adam-Christ read: *1Cor* 15:22.45; *Rom* 5:12ff.

44 J. BUKASA Kabongo, *Jésus dans les théologies sud-africaines*, in Fr. KABASELE ea, o.c., p. 307. Professor Bimwenyi Kweshi supports the same idea. For him Jesus is the first ancestor because he is the origin of life, the original ancestor (Kaaga) (Cf *Le Dieu de nos ancêtres*, p. 143. Cf also, *Discours théologique*, p. 538). One would also consult B. BUJO, *African Theology*, p. 78.

Ancestors, he calls him "Proto-Ancestor", that is, the "First of all Ancestors", "Babu wa Mababu" (in Kiswahili). In A word the "greatest of all the Ancestors."

This Man Jesus, Proto-Ancestor, is the Son of God become man. So God has a Son who has freely chosen to become man for us to reveal the love of God his Father and to lead us to him. Jesus is not a man who becomes God, since from the first moment of his life among us, he was God.[45]

This is all very good. However, the question arises for the African: Does Christ stand up to a detailed examination of all the qualities of an African Ancestor? In other words, can it be said that Christ as Proto-Ancestor is really an Ancestor for the African, seen in his life and in his death? At first glance one would be tempted to answer in the negative. Indeed the conditions and the circumstances in which Jesus died would not allow him access to the rank of ancestor according to Bantu tradition. For he died young, without children, in a horrible death and on a tree of infamy, even though he was innocent.[46]

We think that when the African agrees to insert Christ into the family of his Ancestors, he is assuming henceforth his proper destiny, to enter into God's plan of salvation. This plan is revealed to us definitively in the Incarnation. The consequence of this encounter is that the African welcomes without regret or bitterness the perfection of his beliefs through Christ. A typical case is exactly the situation of Jesus himself who, without the novelty of the Gospel, would not have been called Proto-Ancestor by the African.

Christ is Ancestor from all time. When the African calls him "Proto-Ancestor" it is only to open himself to the Revelation which teaches him the pre-existence of the Word of God. "His 'ancestrality' goes beyond all anthropological or cultural parameters. He is Ancestor because from all time, he has been the source of life, and not because we declare him such. In fact to say of him that he is an Ancestor, is to recognize in faith that he is before all things."[47]

45 Cf P. FERLAY, o.c., p. 103 and 110.

46 Cf Fr. KABASELE, *L'au-delà des modèles* in Fr. KABASELE ea, o.c., p. 21. The author explains on the same page that ancestor must have died "well" in the sense that he must have known a good death, that is a death coming normally, at the end of a long happy life of wealth and of offspring. Thus the hanged, those struck by lightning, the victims of torture, the sterile, the cursed never have access to the dignity of ancestor.

47 LUYEYE Luboloko, o.c., p. 235. Professor BUJO agrees in affirming that Christ possesses all the qualities and virtues of an African Ancestor (Cf B. BUJO, *African Theology*, p. 80).

Presenting Christ as Proto-Ancestor fits perfectly into the mental schema of the African. For in this schema the Ancestors are the pillars on whom rests the whole human community. He respects and reverences them. They must protect and support him. Christ does not come to suppress this view but to fulfil it (Cf *Mt* 5:17-19). He transcends the experience of the African ancestor, of all human Ancestors.

Through Christ the Ancestor is integrated into the plan of salvation, for on the temporal and phenomenological plane, they are the ones who by their good conduct and their teaching showed the way to life for their progeny. And it is because of this that they can be considered as the precursors of Christ the Proto-Ancestor.[48]

To conclude, we maintain that to speak of Christ as Proto-Ancestor is within the normal logical expression of the Incarnation of Word in (African) humanity, of which he is the origin and the end. In him God raised the veil which kept the African isolated within his daily preoccupations. Thus, moreover, Christ is the ultimate (eschatological) Revelation of God.

Much more could be said about Christ as Proto-Ancestor, "organic Medium" and of the proximity of God.[49] In the following point we will return briefly to this. Christ is Eldest because he is Proto-Ancestor.

Christ the Elder in the Extended Family

The African has a very broad notion of the family. For him indeed the family goes beyond the restricted group of father, mother and children, The uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, ancestors, great friends, heroes ... are all an integral part of the family. It is a reality obvious everywhere in Africa. It is therefore opportune and appropriate to regard Christ the Proto-Ancestor, as the Eldest of the great family. In this way the African has no problem in understanding the demands and the will of Christ, the Elder.

For the African therefore, we say, the family is the natural milieu where man is born and lives. It is there that he finds protection and

[48] LUYEYE Luboloko, o.c., p. 233. Professor BUJO says the same and adds that the Ancestors are the "figures" of Christ the Proto-Ancestor (cf *Nos Ancêtres*, p. 127-173). The comparison ends at the level of analogy. Because the "Christic model" is perfect, then the "ancestral model" must be perfectd by Christ

[49] For a complement of news one can refer between other to: B. BUJO, *La diaire d'un théologien africain*, p. 26; B. BUJO, *African Theology*, p. 79, 80, 83, and 84; V. MUPITA Baliki, o.c., B.T.A. 5 (1981), p.44-45.

security and where he is assured of continuity beyond earthly life by his union with the Ancestors.[50] Within this family the members are classified according to their order of arrival into this world, beginning with the one who is closest to the sources of life and to the beginnings of the family. So the very first to be named "Elder" seems to be God. He is prior to all beings. The Luba of Kasai calls him, among other names, "Mvidi Mukulu," meaning "Mvidi Elder (First born)." Pursuing this African logic to its extreme, one could attribute to Christ the unique Son of God, the same qualifier as that of his Father. "For among the Bantu the sons of the Eldest brother remain senior to the sons of the younger brother; even if these were born before, those in the lineage descended from the eldest will always be senior."[51]

How can we pass from African anthropology to Christology? The answer is given by Revelation itself. It is St Paul who provides us with the best illustration of the transition from the eldest in the African family to Christ, the Eldest in the new family. He uses the word "first-born" for the position of "Eldest" (Cf *1Cor* 15:20; *Rom* 11:16). St Paul also uses the expression "Christ, firstborn of the living and the dead" (Cf *Rom* 8:29; *Col* 1:15.18; *Heb* 1:6; *Rev* 1:5). Christ is therefore the Eldest by the will of God, his Father and our Father. He is the eldest among many brothers.

Consequent on this status, the African is overjoyed to discover that around Jesus, the Eldest, there is a great extended family.[52] What family is this? It is certainly not the family in the African sense only. It would be to reduce Christ to being the head of a large family. All those descended from the same Ancestor, the Proto-Ancestor Christ, are members of the same family. They feel united by a spiritual link based above all on the remembrance of a common Ancestor.[53]

Christ the Elder is the firstborn of all those who listened to his Word and put it into practice (*Lk* 6:46-49; *Mk* 4:33-34; *Mt* 12:48-49). They are constituted in a great family called the Church. This is the prolongation of the Incarnation and it is through the Church that Christ is part of every human society.[54]

50 Cf PAUL VI, o.c., no 10.

51 Cf Fr. KABASELE, *Le Christ comme Ancêtre et Aîné*, dans Fr KABASELE ea, o.c., p. 134. There are also some indications of this direction in V. MUPITA Baliki, o.c., p. 67.

52 Cf R. LUNEAU, *Et vous, que dites-vous de Jésus-Christ?* in Fr. KABASELE ea, o.c., p. 19.

53 Cf B. LUYNKS, *Renouvellement liturgique en Afrique,* in Concilium 12 (1996) p. 126.

54 Cf E. VERDIEU, P. ONDIA, *Sacerdoce et négritude* dans *Des Prêtres noirs s'interrogent*, p. 87. The question of the universatility of the salvation of Christ will be examined in the

Christ the Elder, has made the African an adoptive son of God (Cf *Rom* 8:15; *Eph* 1:5; *Gal* 4:5; *Lk* 20:36). This filiation connects him automatically to Christ the Proto-Ancestor and to all humanity, which becomes the henceforth "new family"' of disciples of "Babu wa Mababu." The proximity of God," blossoms then into this "mysterious divine adoption" unveiled by the proclamation of the Good News in Africa.

The herald of this Good News must be happy to say to the African who appreciates the familial dimension of life, that Christ founded a family called Church and that this new family is accessible to him right now and all humanity is destined to enter its bosom.[55]

In order to be a member of the Christian family, that is the family of Christ "Proto-Ancestor and Elder," it is necessary to be born a second time. In other words, to be born of water and the Spirit (Cf *Jn* 3:5). The members of this great Family were born neither of blood, nor of the desire of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but from God (Cf *Jn* 1:12-13) by Baptism in Christ Jesus.

This idea of Christ as "Proto-Ancestor and Elder" is determinant in the elaboration of an African ecclesiology (inculturated) where the Church, the people of God, is discerned as the great family of the faithful belonging to Christ, their Elder.[56]

This progression underlying the Incarnation brings the African before a God who begets him continually in the sense that if he cuts himself off or detaches himself from the primordial Source of life, the Proto-Ancestor, he dies and disappears without leaving any trace. For he will have broken the chain of the vital familial life-force (Cf *Jn* 15:1-17). The fundamental and privileged means to stay in communion with God is the love of neighbour, because since the Incarnation man has become the privileged place of encounter with God. Can one find a better illustration of the proximity of God as the corollary-event of the Incarnation?

second point of chapter 2. For the moment we remain with the notion of the Church gathering all those who have responded to the call that God made through Jesus Christ.

55 Cf B. MUZUNGU, *Religion traditionnelle africaine*, p. 88. An abundant literature confirms this affirmation of Muzungu concerning the link between Christ the Elder, the Church as new family, and the African (Christian). We mention, among others: BUJO B, *African Theology*, p. 75, 92, 112, 113, and 114; B. ADOUKONOU, o.c.. p. XXIV; V. MULAGO, *Un visage africain du Christianisme*, p. 95-101; B. MUZUNGU, *Le Dieu de nos pères*, vol. 2, p. 93. All these authors are unanimous in saying that Christ the Elder founded a family, gathering together all men.

56 Cf V. MUPITA Baliki, o.c., p. 104.

The practical aspect of the demands that are included in such a vision will be the object of the reflection in the pages which follow. But now we can already see that because Christ is Elder, it is to him only that one must offer all the sacrifices and gifts, and that it is for him in his turn to present them to God, according to African traditions.[57]

A last point. Christ is Elder because he gave life to his brothers and he gave it until he gave himself as a ransom for his "younger brothers" who were kept captives by sin (Cf. *Is* 53:4-5; *Mk* 14:22-24; *Lk* 22:19; *Jn* 11:50; *Heb* 7:27; 9:14; *1Jn* 4:10). This was the supreme proof of the love of the Elder for his younger brothers. And it is starting from this gift of life that he founded a family, a human community

The dichotomy between the African Ancestor and Christ disappears, because in view of all that has just been said we are brought back to this, that Christ is the Eldest of all the Ancestors. This point is of the greatest importance. It constitutes a transcendence of African tradition. This transcendence is not only the fruit of human effort. Christ the Elder introduces it to the African progressively, according to the pace of African traditional initiation. Thus Christ is for the African the Great Initiator.

Christ the Initiator

Just a glance at this title draws us to the African traditions of initiation. One cannot conclude any reflection on the Christian African expression of the mystery of the Incarnation without making allusion to the process through which the African is integrated into the new family of Christ. Indeed this last corresponds perfectly to the qualities and the roles of the African initiator who introduces the youths into the tradition of the community and into adult society.

Christ the Initiator[58] introduces the African into a knowledge of God who, as we have said, is not discerned always as the partner of

[57] Cf Fr. KABASELE, *Christ as Ancestor and Eldest* in Fr. KABASELE ea, o.c., p. 135. Professor Kabasele illustrates his thesis by an example. Among the patrilineal peoples of Kasai, he says, the respect owed to the eldest requires that the man who gives in marriage his first and his second daughters, does not benefit from the bride-price, he must offer the whole of it to his eldest brother or to the son of the latter. It is the same for the first salary of the youngest son: the whole of it is given to the eldest (the same page). Evidently Christ transcends this pattern for he receives only in order to give to the Father. In the course of the eucharistic celebration he offers himself with the faithful to the Father.

[58] It is the title of a book of Professor Luyeye Luboloko to which we have already alluded.

man especially in time of adversity. He guides him, as with the Samaritan woman, to discover the true face of God in the exercise of the true religion who is the worship of God in spirit and in truth (Cf *Jn* 4:1-42), without forgetting the love of neighbour (Cf *Mt* 25:31-46). With the Incarnation the human person becomes the temple of the Spirit (*1Cor* 3:16; 6:13-20; *2 Cor* 6:16; *Heb* 3:6). The place of worship of true God, that of Christ the Proto-Ancestor, is no longer a temple made by human hands, neither the trees nor the sacred places, nor the small huts behind the African common. But above all, it is the person, concrete and situated in time and place, continuing in Christ and created in the image of God, who has now? become an epiphany of God, or better a "theophany."

Christ Initiator is the one who by his teaching, vivid and symbolic, reveals to the African the will of God and the coming of his Reign in the world. He initiates us to higher things, to intimacy with God.[59] He is the Great Initiator for only he knows the Father.

The whole earthly life of Christ consisted in the awakening of human understanding to the impenetrable mystery of God. He spoke, he acted, he corrected, he reproved his brothers out of love for them, and even when he returned to the Father he sent the Spirit to throw light on the shadowy areas of his teaching (*Jn* 14:16-17; 16:5-15; *Gal* 4:6; *Phil* 1:19).

Jesus is Master of initiation because he has shown to the African the love of God and of neighbour, the prayer of worship and intercession, gentleness and forgiveness, filial obedience, the gift of his life for others even to suffering and death, self-giving, sharing ... These values appear in very familiar symbols: the tree (of the cross), the water (of Baptism), the bread, the wine and the family meal (the Eucharist), the washing of the feet (humble service), the night (on the mountain or desert, in prayer), life and death.[60]

It is not our intention here to make a deep study of African initiation: The restricted setting of our work does not allow it. In summary we can say, in all that is African, that a master of initiation in Africa has to try to lead the youths who are turned over to him until adult-

[59] Cf LUYEYE Lubokolo, o.c., p. 176.

[60] Cf A.T SANON, *Jésus, Chef d'initiation?* In A. T. SANON ea, *Enraciner l'Evangile*, p. 176. A.T. SANON published the same reflections in Fr. KABASELE, o.c., p. 143-166, under the title *"Jésus, Maître d'initiation."* In *"Abrégé de la foi catholique"*, p. 104, P. Ferlay summarizes the mission of Christ as follows: he comes to search for man to introduce him into the life of God's love.

hood through tests, instructions, rituals; then we take this picture of a master of African initiation and apply it to Christ who comes in order to lead the African to the full understanding of the truth. Every comparison is defective, and here the analogy serves as an anthropological prop in order to go beyond the African reality.

Indeed Christ cannot be compared to other African initiators. For his initiation is unique and universal, emanating from his unique and universal mission. No one goes to the Father except through him, because he is the unique Revelation of the Father and the unique source of Salvation.[61] He is the ancestor initiator par excellence, the Great Spirit Initiator, as Professor Bujo says.[62]

Another difference between the master of African initiation and Christ Initiator is this: the African initiatory teaching is esoteric, it is secret and reserved only to the initiates (old and new). But the teaching of Christ is addressed to for all and must be proclaimed in season and out of season, from the rooftops; it is a teaching which grips the new initiate. He becomes in his turn the disseminator of what he has seen and known of the Word of God, the Initiator for a new humanity (Cf *Acts* 2:14ff; *Acts* 4:20; *1Jn* 1:1-4).

"Finally, whereas the (African) masters of initiation transmit a wisdom, a teaching, Jesus gives himself to be known and encountered. It is not knowledge that he comes to deliver, he gives himself, and in his giving, it is God whom he gives that he may be known to men. To know God, is to have an experience of God in Christ, it is an encounter, a communion with his Spirit.[63]

Christ the Initiator helps the African to understand the proximity of God in the Incarnation. With regard to what has been said the answer can only be positive. Christ makes us enter into the mystery of God by his teaching in word and action and especially by his life wholly consecrated to telling the African who God is. He does it progressively according to the African capacity for understanding (Cf *Heb* 5:11-6,1; *Jn* 13:7:12).

We have intentionally avoided describing African and Christian initiations in order to fix our attention solely on the masters of African initiation and Christ-Initiator. Such an approach seems a better way of introducing the mystery of the Incarnation and consequently that of the Proximity of God.

61 Cf J. PAUL II o.c., no 5-6. Jn 14, 6; Ap. 22,13; *Gaudium et spes,* no 2; *Ad Gentes,* no 3.
62 Cf B. BUJO, *Pour une éthique africaine nchristologique*, p. 45-46.
63 LUYEYE Lubokolo, o.c., p. 179. The word in brackets is our own.

By way of concluding this first theme of our second chapter it would be useful to repeat that with the Incarnation of the Word, God speaks in a complete and definitive way to man in general and to the African in particular. The African is delighted with the Good Newss, trying to "insert the Newly-Come-Always-There" into his community of living terrestrials. Realizing the superiority of his Host and the unusual nature of his Message, he names him the Proto-Ancestor, Elder, Initiator.

The "prestige" of Christ in Africa derives especially from the fact that God, while remaining the wholly Other, the Incomprehensible, the Inaccessible, is rendered tangible, visible, accessible, through his Word made flesh. The Organic Medium of the presence of God to the World, Christ is the revealer of the will of the one whose marvels the Ancestors related from generation to generation.

Professor Ngindu Mushete provides a good synthesis of what we have developed above. "Firstborn from the dead, Christ appears as the elder par excellence, the ancestor of humanity, unique mediator between God and men. He is the way, the door of access to the Father. In him there are concluded and accomplished the words and the deeds of mediation of our Ancestor. As the Ancestor of Christians, Christ is the Ancestor of the Bantu Ancestors."[64]

It is true that the introduction of these anthropological categories into African Christian theology will always include the danger of "particularizing" the whole Christian mystery. But we think that they must be considered as a "starting points" for a good inculturated reflection on Christian Revelation and the pre-condition for the blossoming of the community of African Christian faithful.

These Christological names or titles taken from the African cultural heritage are well-adapted to help the African to a better knowledge of the God of his Ancestors, and knowing him better, to serve him more adequately in his neighbour created in the image of God and saved by Christ, the Proto-Ancestor, Eldest of renewed humanity.

64 A. NGINDU Mushete, *La Figure de Jésus dans la Théologie Africaine*, dans Concilium 216 (1988), p. 96.

II.
The Relevance of the Mystery of the Incarnation for the African

The Word of God came, he spoke, he was unjustly murdered, he rose from the dead, he returned to his Father. That was the itinerary of the man-Jesus, the one called "Christos" (Cf *Mt* 27:17). The brief stay of Christ in the world did not pass unobserved by men. The Holy Spirit caused an extraordinary dynamism in those who followed the teaching of Christ. He has given them a super human strength to testify to the rest of world about what they had seen and heard.

The echo of the voice of these heralds of the Good News resounded as far as the hills, the forests and the savannahs of Africa. The African ran to meet the Stranger. He who said he was: the Messenger of the God of his Ancestors. He could not remain indifferent. He was approached by his Host to know more about Him. And now the light has emerged: the Messenger of God was the Son of God, he was God. This unusual visit became at the same time "curious and troubling." But the divine Host reassured the African: "Do not fear, it is I." "I have come so that you may have life and have it more abundantly" (Cf *Jn* 10:10).

The African, waiting expectantly for the arrival of a happy life, of possessions, of progeny and of length of days, has been smitten and now clings to this Man who brought him such a Message of Salvation: the true understanding of the God provides eternal life (Cf *Jn* 17:3).

The way by which he gives this "life in abundance" is the cross. And that is what is so shattering, a 'scandal' for the African. That God would make man in his image, that is acceptable. But that he himself would take on the image of man and espouse all that is human, even to an ignominious and brutal death, that is beyond human understanding. Here we touch on the uniqueness and the novelty of the Christian Revelation.[65]

The Incarnation of the Word of God henceforth diffuses into and penetrates every sector of the life of the African person. He has a new outlook on his own life and on that of his brother, and thus also on the general life of the community for all events now become new places for reading the will of the God who has pitched his tent among men.

[65] Cf E.J PENOUKOU, *Réalité Africaine et Salut dans le Christ*, in *Spiritus* 89 (1982), p. 379.

"The reality of the Incarnation requires that the Christ unites himself with every man in the entirety of his condition and in what gives humanity its culture."[66] Christ became one of us in order to be united with man on his path towards God.

He came in response to the deepest longings of the African person: the longing for security, for material and social well-being, for numerous progeny, for communal harmony, to "harness" and maintain the life force; and above of all these "terrestrial needs," there is the longing for God the Absolute Master and Maker of all, from whom come all things and to whom go all things.

All the African thirsts find their ultimate expression in Christ. That is why we say that the universal Salvation that the Incarnate Son, the Proto Ancestor brings, liberates the African from his fears, from his anguishes and from all kinds of powers which oppress him and enclose him in darkness. He saves him beginning from the concrete situation where he is.

It is thus that the Incarnation of the Good News in Africa ought to be examined in depth in the perspective of poverty and oppression, of those whom Fanon called, among others, "The Wretched of the earth."[67] Therefore any one who would begin to reflect on this revealed Message should be concerned to base his language in the existential experience of his living community. Otherwise he will undergo the fate of Paul at Athens: "we will listen to you another time" (*Acts* 17:32).

It is in the name of this wise and good principle, fixed in the logic of the Incarnation that it is necessary "that the theologian is present where he works, where he struggles for justice, where he suffers and sometimes where he dies. The Theologian cannot pass through battles with a rose in his hand."[68]

This last section of our reflection will be more practical and more centered on the liberating salvation of the dead and risen Christ and on the confident adherence that this Salvation provokes in the African. We will have as background and as framework the Incarnation of the Word who, as we have said several times, became the unique frame-

[66] R, LUNEAU *Le vent souffle où il veut*, p 34.

[67] Cf F. FANON, *Les Damnés de la Terre,* Paris 1985. English translation: *The Wretched of the Earth,* Penguin, 1967.

[68] Fr. MALLEY, *Les enjeux de la théologie de la Libération*, in *Le retour des certitudes*, Paris, 1987, p. 58; See also *Evangelium Nuntiandi*, no 29. In fact it is not mentioned by anyone.

work for reading the will of God and human realities. This, we repeat, may reinforce, diminish, and sometimes suppress life, so dear to all men.

Christ the Proto-Ancestor, Beyond Models

We could have chosen as title, "Christ, the particular and universal Proto-Ancestor." We chose the one above because it seems to better translate the ideas that we propose to develop here. It comes to us from Professor Kabasele.[69] But what urged us to opt for the expression of kabasele's is that it summarizes the notions of both particular and universal. So far is this true that it is only the particular which can be universal. And in the course of our reflections we will make use sometimes of the category "particular," sometimes of "universal" or again of "beyond models."

"Jacob begot Joseph, the spouse of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ" (*Mt* 1:16). It is thus that Matthew begins the Good News of Christ the Son of God (Cf *Mk* 1:1). Through the genealogy given by Matthew we see the humano-terrestrial background of Jesus. He is not an "extraterrestrial" coming from one doesn't know where. He has some roots in a human very clealy described community. We know his father Joseph, his mother Mary, his brothers and sisters (Cf *Mt* 13:55-56).

The mention in the ancestry of Jesus of the names of four women foreign to Israel emphasizes the universality of the person and of the salvation that he brings to the world.[70] The Christ, beyond all patterns, at the same time particular and universal "brings together in a single body, all the ancestors and by that very fact all men of good will.[71]

Christ came not only for the children of Israel. His person and his mission are destined for all nations, all people, all cultures. The story of the Cananite woman running to Jesus to obtain the recovery of her daughter tormented by a demon, proves this well enough.[72] Or again

69 A. LUNEAU, *Le vent souffle où il veut* p. 34.

70 Cf Mt 1,1-17, note "e", T.O.B., Complete Edition.

71 C.E.Z. ,o.c., p. 69.

72 Cf T.O.B., Complete Edition: *Mt* 15: 21-28. The note "o" forms part of our interpretation. Perhaps Jesus wants to test the faith of this woman by his initial resistance (pedagogical) to her request. Or perhaps he considers himself in actual fact as sent first of all to Israel, and thus the final fulfilment of the request of this pagan woman announces through an exceptional case, the access of pagans to salvation after his death and resurrection. Many Matthean texts sustain this second interpretation (e..g. 8:5-13; 21:33-44; 28:16-20).

the sending of the disciples on mission by Jesus himself with the command to make all nations the disciples of the master (Cf *Mt* 28:19-20).

The mission and the work of Christ the Elder emanates as a consequence from the particularity of his person and from the universality of his ministry. It is because Jesus is "distinctive" in time and space, and therefore a particular and unique character, then every person can find himself in him and identify with his person. In other words, on this Jesus beyond any model, every man can "model" himself, being given his "primitive or initial guideline [demarcation]" of all particular humanity.

This is what P. Ferlay affirms when he maintains that "Jesus is Jewish. He could not be a member of the human community without being more precisely a member of a human group, a people. Jesus is human in being Jewish. It is in being a part of this people that he is present as God among us."[73]

Christ transcends all cultures, all nations, all languages. He transcends immeasurably all human patterns, the chiefs, the eldest, the masters of initiation, the Ancestors, the heroes, the spirits. He is truly "the one beyond every model", for no human experience, no human language knows how to present with relevance the "unique event" of the "wholly Other" who has become man, who has accepted to enter into the "human contingency." And it is from here, that he draws the African from his ethno-tribal multi-secular shackles.

We note thus that in Jesus, Son of the Impenetrable Creator and of Mary and Joseph, the particular and the universal co-penetrate harmoniously and even merge necessarily, to give Christ the Proto-Ancestor to the whole of a humanity haunted by the demon of division. What is beyond patterns becomes the pattern for all humanity and of all the humanity called to the "experiential" knowledge of God.

The consequence of these affirmations is transforming and stimulating for the African. The reference point is no longer the tribe, the extended family, or the clan. The criteria for social communion and for communal cohesion is no longer the solidarity of clan and tribe. Christ, "The one beyond every pattern," is henceforth the pattern, and not only the example, of the new humanity inaugurated by Him. He has exploded the former collective places of life and of meaning to

[73] P. FERLAY, o.c., p. 91. The author had already said on p. 90 that "Israel is the corner of our earth where God came to meet us, and where his path, in a definitive manner, crossed the path of man.

integrate them in the Word made flesh. Now it is in him that all men are in solidarity with one another.

Professor A. Ngindu Mushete summarizes all that we have just said: "Thus understood, the incarnation of the Word assumes the totality of humanity and of the cosmos. Christ is indeed the Proto Ancestor, the ancestor of humanity. He really is the Lamb of God who carries the sins of the world. He saves mankind and with it the whole of creation."[74]

A.T. Sanon seems to put it better. For him the Incarnation of the Word serves as a mediation of Redemption by way of his humanity: "We are really at the source of the new being: here is a man living a universal human experience, capable of assuming all humanity, open to all humanity. In the place of the normal closure that we find in all the experiences and traditions that man has lived, there is the opening to the very dimension of a heart inhabited by the infinitude of the divinity."[75]

What more can be said after all these reflections, more or less convergent affirming a single reality, that Christ the Proto-Ancestor came to our humanity in a particular human form, and is at the same time beyond every particular human form. It is in this way that he can reach the African who could not imagine such a thing. The Unexpected Host drew him into an unaccustomed interrelational current. Accepting this with admiration and respect, the African called him "Universal Brother."

This title was awarded him in consideration of his capacity to bring two foreign peoples together, Israel and the pagans, in order to constitute them the unique people of God.[76]

A lesson can be drawn from all these accounts: enclosing Christ in our human and African categories of Chief, Ancestor, Healer, Elder, Initiator would be a attempt at monopolization of the Universal by the

74 A. NGINDU Mushete, *Le thèmes majeurs de la théologie africaine*, Paris, 1989, p. 93. One can also refer to A.T. Sanon, *Jésus Chef d'initiation*, p. 170. This author emphasizes that the concrete and particular humanity of Jesus puts him in solidarity with all humanity. In addition, his situation in a definite culture prepared him in a human way to understand the values of cultures other than his own. We qualify this thought of Sanon by saying that the "particular" does not precede the "universal" in Jesus, as one might believe. Jesus is at the same time particular and universal in his coming into the world. On this point, see LUYEYE Luboloko o.c., p 217-218.

75 A.T. SANON, *Jésus, Chef d'initiation*, pp. 170-171.

76 Cf *Lumen Gentium* no l; *Ep* 2:11-22. For the title " Universal Brother," refer to Professor Antonio SCARIN, *Jalons pour une spiritualité africaine dans l'enseignement de l'épiscopat africain*, in CERA 24 (1990), no 47, p. 360.

individual. We have just emphasized that the Christ Proto-Ancestor is beyond categories and African christological patterns. Indeed God raised him and gave him a Name which is above all names (Cf *Ph* 2:9). For "A Christ enclosed in structures, be they Christian, of the West, of the East or of Africa, would no longer be beyond any patterns."[77]

The Incarnation of the Word invites us to go beyond race, tribe, clan, family, friends, culture, forest, savannah, village ... in brief to always go to the one beyond all models, the Christ Proto-Ancestor of all humanity.

It is on this condition only that Christ the first born could be the Liberator and the Saviour of the African in giving him life without end.

The Risen Christ, Liberator of the African

The Incarnation of the Son of the God of our Ancestors reached its culmination in the death of Christ Proto-Ancestor. A death, it is true, unacceptable to an African, considering the circumstances and conditions in which it occurred, as we have emphasized above (Cf the narratives of the Passion and Death). This death apparently so ignominious, was the source of an impregnable life through and with the Resurrection of the one Condemned to death and crucified under Pontius Pilate (Cf *Mt* 27:26).

Christ, dead and risen, conquered the world, that is the forces of evil (Satan) and death which is their corollary (Cf *Jn* 16:33). Thus he truly became the Proto-Ancestor, for in him the deep longings of the African found their satisfaction. The life of the African reached its fullness, not so much in terms of longevity as in quality. The fears, the anguish, the concerns of the African were taken away by the victory of the Great Master Initiator in his death.

It is insofar as the Risen Christ constitutes and achieves definitively this guarantee of a full human life without end, that we can affirm that the Incarnation is a liberating event for the African. The idea of a life beyond this earthly life is not strange to the African tradition. For truly the Risen Christ opens for the African a perspective of a full life, a life without end, something to which the African has aspired from the beginning.

[77] Fr. KABASELE. *L'au-delà des modèles*, p. 206; V. MUPITA Ḅaliki, o.c., p. 115.

But concretely what does this mean? The Word of God was made flesh. He spoke, he acted. He died in conditions that we already know. He is risen and the Apostles are his witnesses (Cf *Jn* 20). The African has welcomed him as a messenger of liberation and of salvation. What liberation? What salvation?

Professor Luyeye said about this Pascal event: "It is through this *ultimate salvific Act,* when God raised Jesus from among the dead, that man understands his profound destiny: God did not create him for death, but for life. He will never abandon man. And he has given his Son as the *Messenger of life without end.* He is the Living, the *First of the living.*"[78]

The Messenger of eternal life comes to liberate the African definitively from "biophobic" forces which prevent him from living fully and developing himself to the full. We will see more of these two "good news", of life without end and of liberation.

Christ, the Messenger of Eternal Life

We are within in the logic of the Incarnation of the Word of God in this: that he is the ultimate manifestation of the God of our Ancestors. We said in the first chapter that God is the source of life. He wants us to participate in this life, so he sends his own Son into the world. The life that he comes to transmit is not a "thing" but it is himself. He will be delivered to the executioners so that his brothers, mankind, may have life in its fullness (Cf *Jn* 10:1-18). A God who not only becomes man but also and especially delivers himself to death so that mortal men may have life, can only captivate the African.

It is truly news, Good News for an African to learn that henceforth he will not die any more; that he has an opening to another life without end. This he knew already, for he believes in life after life. But the risen Christ comes to confirm this faith and to purify it as a projection of terrestrial life in an after-life that remains ill-defined because little known.[79]

Paradoxical as it may appear, life without end, life in its fullness, emerged from the death of the Firstborn, the Proto-Ancestor. This was so that "For all the living, it is life which allows us to die once we submit to life. But until Jesus, death did not yet liberate life into its

[78] LUYEYE Luboloko, o.c., p. 282. It is the author who underlined.
[79] Cf B. MUZUNGU, *Eschatologie africaine*, p. 9.

fullness, its newness: henceforth it is death which liberates us into a greater life, that of the risen one."[80]

The Risen Christ does not die any more. Over him, death, suffering, jealousy, hate, sorcery, invocation of the dead, bad luck ... no longer have any power (Cf *1 Cor* 15; *Rom* 6:9). The African who has welcomed this Good News has accepted to put himself under the protection of this "Great Hero" who has crushed all enemies and placed them as a stool under his feet (Cf *Ps* 109: 1; *Acts*: 2:35; *Heb* 1:13). For the African his enemies are all the forces that qualify as "biophobes." A new thing must be added to this, and that is sin which is also the cause of death in the sense that it cuts us off from contact with God, the source of life in its fullness (Cf *Heb* 12:1; *Tit* 3:11).

The African could learn only by revelation the ideas of the suffering and death of God, the Resurrection, the notion of sin, because these were unimaginable for him.[81] If the African begins from the incarnation and its aftermath then he will be led necessarily to the logic of the Cross. Thus he situates himself in the prolongation of the Incarnation by which the Son of God has assured the fate of man until death.[82]

We can consequently understand the life, death and. resurrection of Christ as being a journey of solidarity with (African) man. It is moreover in this perspective that he received the names of Proto-Ancestor, the Elder, Initiator. He did not want to keep the divine prerogatives for himself but he preferred to lower himself for the benefit of all humanity (Cf *Ph* 2:6-8).

The finality of the ontological society of Christ is also the anthropological fulfilment of the whole of creation, so that God may be all in all (Cf *1 Cor* 15:28). Conversion of heart, renunciation of evil which is deadly to life, transcendance of self, are so many tests surrounding death which prepare man for his complete and definitive fulfilment in God."[83]

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80 A.T. SANON, *Enraciner l'Evangile*, p.160. We could add that the death of Christ is salvific for the African because it shattered the infernal cycle of life-death even if for the African death was conceived as a journey to the village of the Ancestors. The resurrection of Christ introduces us into eternal intimacy with the God of our Ancestors. This has a happy conclusion for the terrestrial living. They no longer fear the living dead who are henceforth in the eternal home of the God of our Ancestors.

81 Cf KISIMBA Nyembo, o.c., p. 169.

82 Cf KISIMBA Nyembo, o.c., p. 169.

83 E. J. PENOUKOU, o.c., p. 104. In passing through the sequence of life-death-life as a process of achieving human salvation, says Penoukou, Jesus integrates himself into human life, dies a human death and enters into the transformed life, not for himself, but for mankind. For Pope John Paul II, the Christ comes to raise African life to his own (Cf J. Paul II in Kenya, 7/5/1980, In DC 1787 of 1/6/1980; p. 534).

And what is this definitive fulfilment in God? Christ himself answers: "Eternal life is to know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Cf *Jn* 17:3). We already know that to know Christ is to experience his love, to welcome his Message and to put it into practice; this can be reduced to love of God and neighbour. If the African assimilates these two poles and makes them a rule of life, "without doubt he will have eternal life and will rest eternally at the right hand of God (Cf *Mt* 25:31-46).

It is only in this way that we will have a share in the Resurrection of Christ, the inexhaustible source of life without end.[84] It is insofar as the African learns to die every day to selfishness, to tribalism, to jealousy, to lust, to sorcery, to contempt of the other, that he will one day attain the fullness of life. "It is a matter of dying to sin, and to every attitude which distances us from a life of communion with God.[85]

One must take into account this African reality, the longing for life, a life without end. This view is found already in the traditional African funeral rites and later in the Christian funeral ceremony.[86] Life without end is not a simple prolongation of earthly life. It is to remain in pleasant and calm closeness to God, in the company of all the Ancestors-in-the-faith who loved God and served him in their brothers. We will return to this aspect a little later on.

Christ, Messenger of eternal life, immerses the African into his death by baptism and emerges revitalized into a new life in God.[87] This perspective requires the perseverance of the African in listening to and practising the Word of God, who has been manifested definitively in the mystery of the Incarnation. To depart from this way it is to condemn oneself to living cut off from the Ancestors in the faith in God and therefore also from the "life-giving Source," the origin of all life, Christ the Proto-Ancestor.

But to cling to the Messenger of eternal life is to allow oneself to be invaded, already here below, by life in its fullness initiated from this present moment in the communion of the members of the human family around their Eldest Brother, Christ. This then becomes a sure and incomparable answer to the basic longing of all Africans, to know

84 Cfr. B. BUJO, *African Theology*, p. 81 and 93. See also KISIMBA Nyembo, o.c., p. 160.
85 KISIMBA Nyembo, o.c., p.165.
86 Cf KISIMBA Nyembo, o.c., p. 168.
87 Cf LUYEYE Luboloko, o.c., p. 190 and 196. He maintains that Cross, Resurrection and Baptism form a single effective principle which encompasses Christians and unites them around their Master in the Eucharist (p. 190).

how to "live well" on this earth in order to join the Ancestors later in "Kuzimuni" (Kiswahili), that is the place of the dead.

This African-Christian vision of death and life brings the African closer to Christ and thus makes him understand, at least partially, why God has come to him. It is finally in the plan of God for the world that it is necessary to find the explanation of all this divine-human process. Christ came to gather all God's scattered sheep to introduce them into eternal life with God (Cf *Jn* 10).

Christ as Liberator of the African

We have just examined the intrinsic links between the incarnate Christ, dead and risen, and the life in its fullness to which the African aspires throughout his life. Christ introduced him to a personal and experiential knowledge of God as a means of having a share in this life without end. Another means used by Christ is drawing the African away from the structures of individual and collective sin in which he is enclosed today.

In the first chapter we emphasized the fact that the African expects from God protection against the forces of death or "biophobes." The Son of God incarnated in our world accomplished perfectly this task by liberating the African from all that disfigured the image of God in him. This liberation is neither temporary nor provisional, but it is already definitive here below, for Christ conquered death and its causes in an irreversible way. He didn't suppress them but they no longer have the last word in human life.

We are now in the midst of the "fallout" of the humanization of the Word of God. So true is it that the Incarnation, in God's plan of salvation for the world, assumes ontologically a soteriological dimension.[88] Of course when one speaks of Salvation, no one thinks directly of sin in the classic forms relative to the Decalogue. We are situated in the perspective of Christ who comes to fulfil the Law of Moses and bring it to its fullest completion.

A very beautiful example is given by Jesus himself in the episode of "Who is my neighbour?" commonly called the "Parable of the Good Samaritan" (Cf *Lk* 10:29-37). In this parable Jesus concretizes the command to love God and neighbour (Cf *Dt* 6:5; *Lv* 19:18). We can situate

[88] Cf J. GUILLET, *Jésus devant sa vie et sa mort*, Paris, 1971, p. 125.

all his teaching, in words and in deeds, within this same movement. His miracles and other deeds in particular are liberating gestures to such a point that they disturbed the religious leaders of the Jews and the political representatives of Roman power. He was dangerous, bothersome and obstructing in that he disturbed the established order, and laid the foundations of a more human and more brotherly world.

In the same way as Moses, his fight was not purely spiritual. It was also political, economic, social, cultural ... in view of forming man in the "image of God." "From this, can one hold only to a soteriological interpretation of the Christ Event?" asks E.J. Penoukou. "Did Christ become man first and foremost to liberate mankind from the sin of Adam? Or, in the radicality of his love in solidarity, did he want to love to the end, becoming man until his victory over death, and liberating man from all that prevents him from being accomplished in such a Love?"[89]

The Incarnation, one could say, made Christ attentive to and appreciative of the anguish, the fears? of the African. He says to him, here and now: "get up and walk" (Cf *Lk* 5:24). He saves him beginning from his concrete situation, a situation dominated by structures of individual and collective sin, structures which carry death within them, contempt for the fundamental rights of man, tribalism, oppression, neo-colonialism and even "spiritual" imperialism?

We note with P.E. Mveng that "the African conceives the world as a vast field of battle where he faces life and death. The role of man in the world is to mobilize the allies of life against those of death, and to assure the victory of the former."[90] He cannot do this alone. But with Christ he is strong enough to carry on the fight decisively and without surrender against all the death-dealing powers, enemies of the Kingdom of love occurring in our world. And it is on this very terrain that the Good News of our Proto-Ancestor is a place of contradiction and contestation of all political, economic or religious power, which endanger the value and the dignity of man fashioned in the image and likeness of God. For it is man in his terrifying daily life, who must struggle with all the forces of death and of dehumanizing situations that Christ came to liberate him from. These can be described in dif-

89 E.J. PENOUKOU, o.c., p. 94.

90 E. MVENG, *Essai d'anthropologie négr- africaien*, in *Cahiers des Religions Africaines* 12 (1978), no 23-24, p. 91.

ferent ways according to the observers of African drama.[91] But everything comes back to a single standpoint: the inadmissible situations in a humanity within which the Son of the God of our Ancestors was made man.

As previously God liberated the people of Israel from the slavery of Egypt (Cf *Ex* 3-4), he comes again today to liberate the people of Africa from all that prevents them from being themselves (Cf *Lk* 4:16-21) in the name of the Incarnation of his own Son.

The first evil which Christ comes to liberate the African from is certainly the negation of black African humanity by the forces of diabolical domination whose stench is still far from giving place to a humanity taken up into and tempered through and in the Incarnation. It is this kind of dehumanization that Professor A. Ngindu Mushete calls "anthropological poverty" and that no material good can satisfy.[92] This dimension of the African struggle is basic and fundamental in the sense that its result is the condition *sine qua non* for a real and definitive liberation in Christ, the Universal Brother.

After slavery, colonial exploitation and anthropological impoverishment, we are livinig in a time of socio-economic strangulation, as

[91] Cf LUYEYE Luboloko o.c., p. 223. On p. 318 Professor Luyeye identifies these dehumanizing situations that he qualifies as keep man enslaved.

1. Identifiable persons, very well known who, through their political or financial power keep the great majority of the population in a situation of material, moral, or ethical destitution.
2. Structures, internal and external, which rob the national product to the benefit these selfish interests. These unjust structures are planned in such a way as to always allow rights to the more powerful and those who have more.
3. Customs, sometimes anachronistic, which subject the person to the caprices of tribal gerontocracy and keep them in constant fear of sorcerers, taboos and fetishes.
4. Practices which perpetuate tribalism and sanctify nepotism and influence, to the detriment of competence and efficicency.

See also: J.M. ELA, *De l'assistance à la libération,* Kinshasa, p. 21; KANGUDI Kabwatila, *Inculturation et Libération,* in *Théologie Africaine: Bilan et perspectives,* p. 206; O. BIMWENYI SWESHI, *Discours théologique,* p. 187.

[92] Cf A.NGINDU Mushete, *Les thèmes majeurs*, p. 95, 105 and 104.
On this topic the Latin-American theologian Gustavo Guttierez distinguishes three levels of struggle for liberation.

1. The socio-political level: to refuse the exploitation of men by men.
2. The level of man himself; for the goal of a suitable education.
3. The theological level; salvation in Christ; liberation from sin but a sin which has a social dimension, the sin of the world. It is not just a matter of spiritual liberation only, that would be an escape.

Of course, there is no clear distinction between the three levels; although they are distinct they are conditioned and continue on the same path together in a process of unique and global salvation. A true liberation is at the same time socio-economic-political, anthropological and spiritual. (Cf *Théologie de la Libération*, Brussels, 1974). P. R. de HAES draws attention to the danger of separating these levels of liberation (Cf *La théologie des Sacrements*, in *Théologie Africaine: Bilan et perspectives,*, p. 229).

M. Rafransoa says so well.[93] The Great Family of those who have heard the liberating Message of Christ the Elder and have responded to it could not remain indifferent to the less than human conditions in which the African lives. In clear terms, the Church, heiress of the divine treasures, prolongs and continues the unique mission of the Redeeming Christ.[94] And in this regard she has the obligation of awakening the African and inciting him to struggle against the debasing and degrading forces which exclude him from the burgeoning of the fruits of the Incarnation in him and around him.

The *"memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Christi"*[95] will be the "war-horse" and the permanent reference point for this process of rehabilitation, first, and then of self-determination, of the man of sorrows, familiar with suffering, of which Isaiah speaks (Cf *Is* 53:3). Christ is identified with this man ground down by the new "Goliath of this world,"[96] crushed by social injustices without precedent, a stranger and exile on the soil of his Ancestors, prevented indirectly from offering a worship pleasing to God.

" God speaks the truth," as we said above. The God of our Ancestors spoke to tell us what he thought of all these situations generating socio-biological death. He spoke through Christ, "Christ true, authentic and consistent, crucified and risen, who is a definitive *NO* to the forces of death in all their forms."[97]

Before pointing a finger at the political leadership of our African countries, the Church has first to take a look at itself with a view to a self-assessment of its concrete action in the line of evangelical liberation derived from the Final Word of God. For it seems to us that there also there is still much to be done. All is not necessarily "collaboration for the building of the Kingdom of God."

The conditions in which the African Christian communities were born, developed and *survive* today are troubling and constitute a theological link which troubles pastors, faithful and more particularly the theological researchers. These communities are maintained in a state of degrading beggary which is humiliating and ongoing and therefore death-bearing. They live always extroverted, their eyes always turned

93 Cf M. RAFRANSOA, *La CETA et la libération de toute l'Afrique*, in *B.T.A.* 6 (1984), No. 12, p. 245.

94 Cf The encyclical "*Redemptoris Missio*."

95 Cf B. BUJO, *Pour une ethique ...*, p. 48.

96 Cf KANGUDI Kabwatila, o.c., p. 206.

97 O. BIMWENYI KWESHI *Religions Africaines, un "lieu"de la théologie Chrétienne africaine,* in CERA 2 (1978), p. 160. It is the author who underlines.

toward their former masters who are still omnipresent under multiple and veiled forms, which are always sore spots.

It has been proven that "a community which is not self-minister-ing, which is economically, politically and culturally dependent or alienated, is an unfit milieu for initiative and creativity."[98] We could add that this milieu is also unfit for the emerging of a really human life and of a truly Christian community living the Good News of our Proto-Ancestor.

It is a real "metanoia" of attitudes, words and deeds which will reverse this situation, apparently firmly established and unchangeable, in order to explode the structures of domination and disintegrate all the "biocidal" forces hidden in an evangelisation of ambiguous col-our. Mutual stone throwing no longer serves any purpose. The African will win his liberation at the cost of several battles, accompanied by setbacks and successes. How could it be otherwise? He must conquer inertia, fear, an inferiority complex created in him by his former mas-ters. He must brave the remarks which will be made and be ready to go beyond obstacles and slippery traps (placed by you know who!), on this path of liberation. He will be so much stronger as he remains in the presence of Christ the Liberator. It is from such risk-taking that there will be born African Christians faithful at the same time to Af-rica and to Christ.

As for the missionary, herald of the Good News, his portrait is traced briefly by Professor Bujo when he says that "Missionaries must stop behaving as neo-colonialist bosses. They must be, not oppres-sors, but liberators, who bring good news."[99] No one can, in the name of the same Gospel of which he says he is the bearer, maintain whole populations in a "handout" mentality of perpetual aid. The Church is invited to pass "from aid to liberation"[100] in the name of his faith in the triune God.

This liberation reaches even in a certain measure to the celebration and the symbolism of the Eucharist. The dependence in this domain produces what Mgr. Sanon calls "the symbolic destitution of the Eucha-

98 O. BIMWENYI Kweshi, *Religions Africaines,* p. 169. Also see B. BUJO *African Theol-ogy*, p. 110; F. EBOUSSI BOULAGA, *Christianisme sans fétiche*, p. 218: in speaking of African churches Eboussi qualifies them as "mendicant and peripheral churches" whose members call for help and implore their former masters not to abandon them.

99 B. BUJO, *African Theology*, p. 111. It is on this condition only that the word of the mis-sionary will take flesh and contribute to the promotion of the proto-ancestral life and the birth of an African Church.

100 Cf. ELA, *De l'assistance à la libération.*

rist." For, he says, while one can give a beautiful theological and philosophical explanation of it, this meal remains artificial, prefabricated and not the fruit of our work, of our soil. And if the fields of millet, manioc, corn, sorghum, if the banana tree, the palm, the pineapple ... sprout and grow to the glory of God, when will be the day when these humble fruits of the African earth will become eucharistic?"[101]

A liberation in this area would contribute progressively to the suppression of cultural, spiritual and economic dependence, which accompanies the "symbolic poverty of the Eucharist." In campaigning for a "eucharist" of the products of the African earth, the African is only actualizing the teaching of the Great Master Initiator who said to his disciples: "Eat whatever they put before you" (*Lk* 10:8).

The debates on this question have been and still are stormy and sometimes passionate, and the last word has not yet been said. For that reason we can express our opinion. We add that the problem is very complex and the economic and international aspect of the affair should not be disregarded. The massive and onerous imports of wheat flour and of approved wine produced by the farmers of the west is a link in the long chain of economic outlets of big international businesses. Breaking this chain would contribute immensely to the progressive and integral liberation which the African has so much need of today. He could then present himself as a "co-operator" and not only a "consumer."

The non-resolution of all the fundamental problems of the Church and the State related above could lead to a more fearful drama than the destitution that seems to be maintained. Indeed "is it not apparent that men to whom all initiative is forbidden accept indefinitely to play

[101] For more detailed information consult: A. T. SANON, *Où est l'Eglise universelle*, in *Lumière et Vie* 137 (1978), p. 81; J. M. ELA, *Ma foi d'Africain*, p. 77; O. BIMWENYI Kweshi, *Discours théologique*, p. 409. We have been shocked and had to question ourselves over a gesture, maybe unconscious and routine, but conveying a whole theological mentality contributing to a mental discrimination between the sacred (the bread and the wine) and the profane (the offerings from nature: linen, beans, rice, sugar)... It was at the celebration of the Last Supper on Holy Thursday (1993) in a parish of West Kinshasa. At the time of the offertory the "profane gifts" were first brought and deposited anyhow at the foot of the lectern. Then the money was collected. And it was with the "sacred gifts" and the money that the procession came toward the Altar of the Lord for them to be offered to the Priest. But in the meantime some one had taken care to remove the first gifts, which therefore were made to seem unwanted, out-of-place, as if one was ashamed of them. Such a practice is very regrettable for it has emptied of its meaning the formula of presentation of the offerings: "Fruits of the earth and of the work of human hands." The remote gifts hastily removed were, for those who produced them, truly the fruit of their sweat and of their fields.

the role of object in history as it unfolds. The absence of this perspective of social and cultural promotion, as of all real involvement in political decision-making, if it is prolonged, would transform Africa from the pariahs of independence to an immense powder keg. What might be considered as passivity and the fatalism of the proletarian masses is perhaps only an illusion. Yesterday, as in the colonial night, the people kept vigil, in the feverish expectation of the auspicious moment when, in spite of the multiple forms of repression, he could prove that he has had enough of it ...at every hour, the desire for revolution haunts the conscience of the *Wretched of the Earth.*"[102]

Christ the Liberator sent his message of liberation to the people of Africa. The Herald of this Good Newss will never lose sight of this dimension of his mission to the African in his struggle against all death-dealing situations." It is thus that the Messenger of eternal life will be truly Proto-Ancestor - listen to the Source of life.

The African in the Steps of Christ the Proto-Ancestor

The African Christian has a heavy responsibility before God and before his brothers. He is a living mediator of the Good News which has emerged in our world. He must henceforth roam the mountains, the hills, the forests and the savannahs of Africa to proclaim in season and out-of-season the marvels of the God of our Ancestors (Cf *2 Tim* 4:2) entering through his incarnate Son into our sinful humanity. As Christ did, he will go among men doing good (Cf *Acts* 10:38), in other words contributing to the support of individual and communal life. The Proto-Ancestor, is the Ancestor of the Ancestors. His last words are a "mine" and a constant reference for his present and future disciples.[103]

We can reduce the last words of Christ to these few words: "Love one another. Love one another as I have loved you. By this will you be known as my disciples: by the love that you have for one another" (*Jn* 13:34-35). He could not have been briefer or clearer. Only one thing was asked of the disciples of the Great Master Initiator, to know how to love God. But God wanted to share our humanity in sending us his own Son, born of Mary and Joseph by the power of the Holy Spirit (Cf *Lk* 1:26-38). We have already said that the human person has become

[102] J. M. ELA, *Le cri de l'homme africain*, p. 70-71. It is the author who underlines.
[103] Cf B. BUJO, *African Theology*, p. 79.

the place of encounter with God through the Incarnation of the Word.

The commitment of the African to follow in the footsteps of the Proto-Ancestor must be concretized by words and deeds that reveal the new proximity of the God of our Ancestor in Christ.[104] Without this his proclamation of the Message of liberation would be muted and in the end would become a dangerous "opium for the people."

By remaining within the setting of Christ the Elder he is led to operate according to African values and to have another look at creation. He sees "in a new way, the other, the world, the indivisible in the relationships which unite them. There is a readjustment, a general overhaul of his previous relationships, a new way of relating to the world. In particular, his relationship to the other is lived in a new way; he has a new understanding of the solidarity of the living and the dead, of history and of the human project in this world."[105]

The African Christian in announcing the passion, death and resurrection of Christ would present it in the spirit of the reality of the mystical body of Christ (Cf *Rom* 12:4-6). The tribe, the clan, the family are not suppressed, but they are inserted into a new network of relationships. The Church is its visible form. And it is in the Church that he sets forth with his brother to follow Christ. This new milieu of life that is the Church will recall to men, day and night, the "spiritual Testament" of the Great Master Initiator, in the practice of love without boundaries.

The notion of "mystical Body" is curiously in harmony with African social organization where, as Mgr. Monsengwo has said, each one knows everyone else, each one is interested in the life and work of everyone else, and each is ready to take the other's load in difficult moments.[106] That seems obvious. It is however an everyday struggle for the African Christian; to overcome the temptation of being enclosed in his small world and leaving the rest of the world to "divine

104 Cf VATICAN II, *Dei Verbum*, no 18. One could also read LUYEYE Luboloko, o.c., p. 260.

105 O. BIMWENYI Kweshi, *Discours théologique*, p. 386. "Like Christ the Universal Brother, the African Christian accepts new forms of national and international solidarity. He becomes of necessity a "brother to everyone" without turning this into a vague universal love which risks being little more than a beautiful and laudable principle. Being a universal brother, or brother to all, means being ready to enter into brotherly and friendly contact with anyone he meets, without discrimination of race, sex, or social condition. There is indeed a danger of sterile abstraction and of malicious emptiness in some formulas such as: "my heart is open to universal love." Can this be verified in minor daily encounters, formal and informal?

106 Cf MONSENGWO Pasinya (Mgr), *L'ésprit communautaire africain*, Kinshasa, 1982, p. 9.

Providence." His adherence to the mystical Body of Christ obliges him, on the contrary, to do everything to enable the proto-ancestral life to circulate among all the other members of the one body.

The African Church has the heavy task of initiating the African Christian to walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ: a task at the same time delicate and joyful, but always difficult. To think otherwise would be in flagrant contradiction of the mystery of the Incarnation and the "spiritual Testament" of the Proto-Ancestor. That is why "to avoid reducing the action of the Church to devout declarations of pastors in a pestilential climate where no one escapes violence, it is necessary to nurture communities of faith who carry the messianic hope of the poor in a society where the agony of repression and regression weighs heavily."[107] This dimension of the mission of the Church and its members has been mentioned above.

The African Christian, following in the footsteps of Christ the Proto-Ancestor will be a light for those who continue to live in doubt, torment and uncertainty about what the next day will bring. He will go among men doing good in the name of Christ, the Universal Brother.

The Good News is presented as a discontinuity within a continuity. It is this which has allowed the African to name, starting from his own socio-anthropological categories, the "personal Messenger of God," in fact the "Equal of God." At once, this last became, now and henceforth close to us in a personal and living way. Living because of the "Newly-Come-Always-There" brought life in its fullness, in abundance.

Christ, the Celestial Host, not only brings life but he is himself the life, and better yet, he is the source of life. What Good News for the African! Incapable of calling him otherwise, so ineffable is the mystery, he calls him the Proto-Ancestor of the Ancestors, in precise reference to the Ancestors, those depositories of life that they received from God for the earthly living. Christ, Proto-Ancestor becomes the Unique Source of inexhaustible life because he himself is without end, being the Alpha and the Omega.

The poverty of human language to express realities that transcend human intelligence led the African to consider Jesus as the Eldest of a Great Family, the Church.[108] The African is very conscious of the pri-

[107] J.M. ELA, *Le cri de l'homme africain*, p. 67.

[108] Christ, of course, extends beyond the visible frontiers of the Church. It would be more convenient to speak of the "Kingdom of God" which, in him, embraces the whole of humanity, while the Church, in the strict sense, encompasses all those who believe in the

mordial role of the eldest son in an African family. And it is because Christ is the Eldest that he is de facto the "Initiator" of his brothers into listening to and putting into practice the Word of God. Thus it is true that he is the way, the truth and the life. In revealing to his brothers the path to God, he reveals himself.

In this second part of our second chapter, we have tried to reflect on the impact and the importance of the mystery of the Incarnation on the African who has receved the Good News coming from outside. The first thesis was that Christ the Proto-Ancestor is beyond any model by which one might want to know who he really is. The great news for the African is that Christ comes to liberate him from all situations of "biocides", that is whatever destroys life in man and in society. The joy of the African is full when he learns that the "Newly-Come-Always-There" is the one who gives him eternal life. That is why he does not desert his "Celestial Host" and he demands urgently that he not abandon him, for there are many ambushes along the way. Sustained by his new Family, the Church, the African Christian becomes in his turn a "sower of life" in the footsteps of Christ the Eldest.

Conclusion

In order to conclude our second chapter we want first of all to recall the project that we first proposed, to know how to grasp the Incarnation of the Son of God as being a new and definitive proximity of the God of our Ancestor. In other words, it is God himself who visited our earth through and in his own Unique Son. This novelty (and that it surely is, for it is not every day that one sees God in person among men) upset the whole world and "shortcircuited" the normal course of history. Men, women, children, the healthy, the sick, Jews, and pagans have been spoken to.

Word of Christ and who have responded to it explicitly by their baptism. But here we do not fear to speak of the Church because we have the viewpoint of an African Christian, one who seeks to understand the Incarnation beginning from belief in the God of his Ancestors. Moreover we affirm, with Pope John Paul II, that there is an intrinsic link and an "unbreakable" relationship between Christ, the Kingdom of God and the Church (Cf John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no 12-20).

A special group united by the Master and Lord arose on our earth and received the noble mission of going to the ends of the earth to hand on the words of the Master, baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, those who would believe. These messengers of the Good News finally reached the African in his hills, forests, and savannahs. This News did not go unnoticed, especially when the African learned that "this Jesus-Christ" was the Eldest and Unique Son of the God of his Ancestors. It was easy enough to pass to the main point: Christ is the Son of God, made incarnate to announce the merciful love of the Father and to save us from all evil, all infirmity, and, something new, from our sins.

The Incarnation of the Word is the final expression of the God of our Ancestors. God has said definitively that he is in his beloved Son. This now becomes the obligatory way to know the Father and to go to Him. He is the "organic Medium" par excellence. In him the mediation of our Ancestors has reached its perfection. Our Ancestors became privileged examples on the path to God for their lives helped the African to welcome the ultimate Revelation coming in and through Christ.

The requirements of this welcome are known: to love God and to love one's neighbour as oneself. This is what the African uses or should use so that the life of the Risen One truly reaches every living being. Christ The Proto-Ancestor, particular and universal, has given him this mission of telling the world about God, the God of Jesus Christ.

The God of our Ancestors sent his Son into the world. He was born, he died, he is risen. He went about among men doing good. He sowed life in abundance, joy, peace, smiles. In brief he gave back to the despised man his dignity as the image of God, he gave health to the sick person, life to the dead, hope to the discouraged. He says today to the African? "Go and do likewise" so that men may have life to the full. The African is not alone in this task. He is a link in the long chain, both diachronic and synchronic, in the ecclesial community. It is here that he is the "Voice of the voiceless," the "hands of those without hands," "the feet of those without feet," in the name of the Proto-Ancestor, Unique Son of the God of our Ancestors and Liberator of the oppressed and unloved, of all the "Wretched of the Earth."

All these considerations have as foundation and framework the proximity of the God of our Ancestors who has left his "celestial world" and come to mingle in the daily web of human life. By the Incarnation, God makes himself close, familiar, visible, tangible, but not identical and "confused" with man. He remains the Wholly Other. However, man can count on him at all times and in all.places.

General Conclusion

"And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we saw his glory" (*Jn* 1:14). In this work we have wanted, to make our modest contribution to the African understanding of the great mystery of the Incarnation. It seems to us that this is the obligatory way for all who want to understand the Message of Christ.[1] The goal that we attempted was to show to the African that this "man Jesus called the Christ" came to announce to him the final victory over death and the forces contrary to life. He came from the God of the Ancestors.

But we can review the main stages in our itinerary. We presented first of all the faith of our Ancestors in God. Indeed God is discerned very often as far and inaccessible and therefore a stranger to the daily concerns of man. After having created the world he retired and allowed man to struggle alone with the invisible powers hostile to him. Abandoned to himself, he turned with confidence toward his Ancestors in order to protect the life he had received from them. He resorts to God in his transcendence only when the ancestral intervention does not give the expected results. God is thus the last resort in the struggle for life.

To remain with this African concept of a transcendent God seems to be an incomplete approach. For one sees the African at the same time resorting to God as to a being who is very close and constantly attentive to the needs of man. We described and were aware of this ancestral faith in an immanent God in theophoric names, in prayers, in popular wisdom... . It is certainly correct to speak of a "Transcendantally Immanent God." Indeed the African cannot imagine a world which could function without the hidden hand of God. All

[1] Cf J. BUKASA KABONGO, *Jésus dans les theologies sud-africaines*, in Fr. KABASELE ea, *Chemins de la christologie africaine*, Paris, Desclée, 1986, p. 307.

that happens to man comes from God or is authorized by Him as master of the world. But at the same time this God remains the Inaccessible, the Wholly Other. The apparent dichotomy between a transcendent God and an immanent God is merely intellectual. In practice God is both at the same time; one aspect will be felt much more that the other according to circumstances that are fortunate or less fortunate for man.

In these relationships between the African and the transcendent God, the Ancestors are our essential interpreters. They are close to the source of the life that God gave to the clan, to the tribe. We noted that the attachment of the African to God is not truly disinterested. He is attracted by the life that God gives not only in creating but also and especially in continuing to sustain and to maintain that life. That is what we wanted to express in what we have called "the expectations of the African vis-à-vis the God of our Ancestors."

The intense longing for life which characterizes the African finds in Christ a satisfying response, or better still, the Response par excellence which goes well beyond their expectation, for it is God himself who comes to obtain for him eternal life.[2] Our second chapter attempted to examine this longing for life which is at the heart of the African experience, in order to show the relevance of the Incarnation in the life of all men in general and of the African in particular. The first step in this process was to try to express this great mystery of faith in African anthropo-cosmic terms. These attempts at translation, more or less successful, have described the obvious desire of the African to try to grasp the elusive, to know the unknowable, to see the invisible, the Stranger-Always-There coming to announce a message of liberation from the God of his Ancestors. For after having spoken to our Ancestors in many ways, God in these last times has sent his own Son in human African flesh (Cf *Heb* 1:1-2).

This "New divine Proximity" so disturbed and penetrated the life of the African that he gave Him names as a "sign of adoption": Proto-Ancestor, Organic Medium, Eldest of the Great Family (the Church), Great Master Initiator. These titles or names are human stammerings attempting to speak the Unspeakable, in the midst of the mystery of a God who became man.

The African remembering what his fathers told him of God, Source of life and of happiness, welcomed Christ, the Ancestor of the Ances-

[2] Cf NYEME TESE, Munga. *Ethique en un milieu africain*, Ingenbohl, 1975, p. 104.

tors, called henceforth to play to perfection the role previously assigned to the Ancestors, to be known as Mediator between God and men. The Ancestors themselves must henceforth work through this unique Organic Medium. "Henceforth the only place of initiation into the knowledge of God and Salvation is the Church. And the only Master is Christ.[3] The Church, because she is the prolongation of the mission of Christ on earth in view of the Kingdom of God which is to come is already in process.[4]

The relevance of the Incarnation for the African no longer needs proof since he, having heard the Good Newss, has taken it to heart with all his socio-religious heritage. This adherence to the Messenger of the God of his Ancestors places him in a new sphere of human relationships. The clan, the tribe, the village, have been enlarged in order to participate in new forms of solidarity in Christ, the one who is beyond all human models.

To the question that Jesus put to his disciples about himself, Peter answered: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (*Mt* 16:13-16). As for the Africans, they believe they can answer: "You are our Proto-Ancestor, it is you who give us Life; You are our Chief, you protect us and guide us to life without end; or again, You are our Healer, you have healed us of sin and evil, notably from the evil of underdevelopment and degrading socio-political structures... . You are our Initiator, you open us to higher things and you teach us from today to live authentic values according to the Saving Plan of your Father."[5]

Without what has just been said we do not see what purpose would have been served by the Word of the God of our Ancestors becoming one of us. So much is this true that if he comes in the place and with the status of the God of our Ancestors he must play, even more clearly, the life-giving role of God. It is on this condition, and on this condition only, that the Incarnation of the Word will be accepted as a new and ultimate proximity of the God of our Ancestors.

This encounter, human-divine-African, makes the African aware of his condition as a slave of sin, individually and collectively, a victim of the "death-dealing" powers so skilfully constructed by the human spirit. The fact that God has come to live in our world is a guarantee of the final victory of good over evil, of life over death, of love

3 LUYEYE Luboloko, o.c., p. 268.
4 Cf. J.Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio,* no 18.
5 LUYEYE Luboloko, o.c., p. 237.

over hate, of peace over war, of justice over injustice ... . The victory of the dead and risen Christ will encourage the African to follow the Proto-Ancestor. The way is still long but the grace of God accompanies all who, following the Master Initiator, act towards their neighbour through living the love of God.

To understand and to live this ideal is the programme of every African Christian in the footsteps of his Ancestors in the faith. Such will also be the task of the African theologian. Such also is our task and we think it has begun.

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AFRICAN CHURCH

Inculturation 2 N. 4

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traditional beliefs in God can be interpreted
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The text is well documented and
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part one, “The God of Our Ancestors”
develops the African view of
God Creator and Father;
while part two, “the Incarnation as the
Closeness of the God of Our Ancestors”
considers the African approach to
the Mystery of Incarnation.

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KJ-642-029